Patterns

EDITION 43rd

April 2001

preface

PATTERNS 43rd EDITION

April 2001

Those of us who work on the annual creation of this magazine have received numerous congratulations on the magazine's recent successes: two first place finishes in the Community College Humanities Association's literary magazine competition over the past three years. And while we're happy with the success of the magazine (and we'll take the compliments), we're also quite aware that it's our students who deserve the kudos. They are, after all, the writers and artists whose work has been honored. Without the art, the poems, the stories, and the essays, there is no *Patterns.*

And so in keeping with the spirit that *Patterns* is about our students and their work, it's time to turn the page, and get on to what's really important – the art and literature of the 43rd edition of *Patterns.*

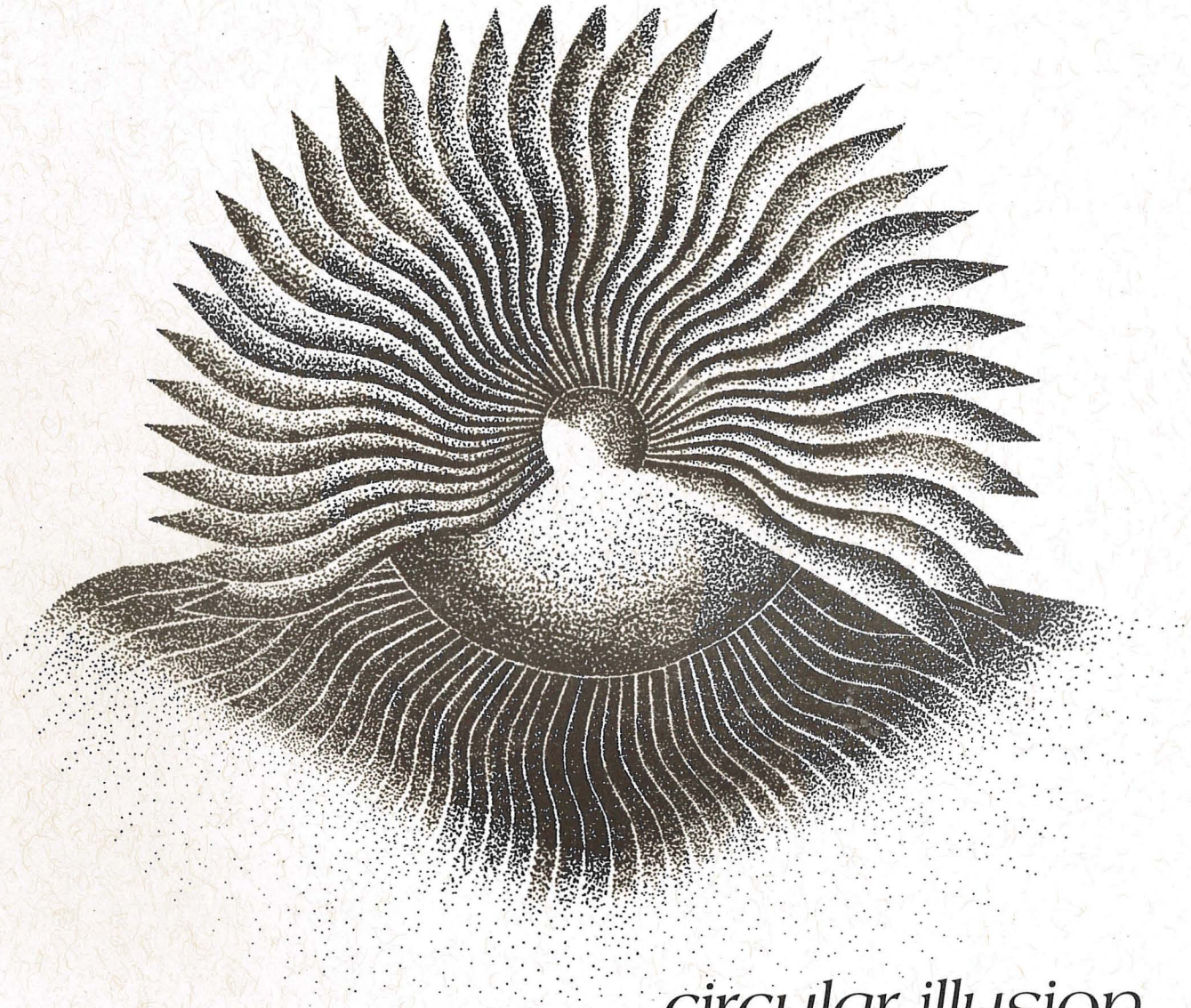
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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

BIOGRAPHY OF *PATTERNS* JUDGES

J. D. Dolan lives in Kalamazoo, MI and teaches at Western Michigan University. Alfred A. Knopf published his book, Phoenix: A Brother's Life in 2000. His work has also appeared in *Esquire, The Nation,* and *New Stories from the South*. He has worked for a number of literary journals as an editor and guest editor, and has received numerous honors and awards for his own writing. Currently, he is working on a novel based on the career of a pocket billiard champion, Ralph Greenleaf.

Pamela Gemin was born in Ann Arbor, Michigan, in 1954, and has lived in Wisconsin since 1983. Her poems have appeared in many literary journals across the country, and she is coeditor of *Boomer Girls: Poems by Women from the Baby Boom Generation,* an anthology of women's coming-of-age poetry published by the University of Iowa Press. Besides her current job teaching composition, literature, and creative writing at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Gemin teaches workshops in creative writing for adults as well as middle school and high school students. Gemin is currently enrolled in the MFA in Writing Program at Vermont College, and lives with her husband, Joseph, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.



circular illusion

SELECTION OF MERIT

Patra Luangsuwan

patterns

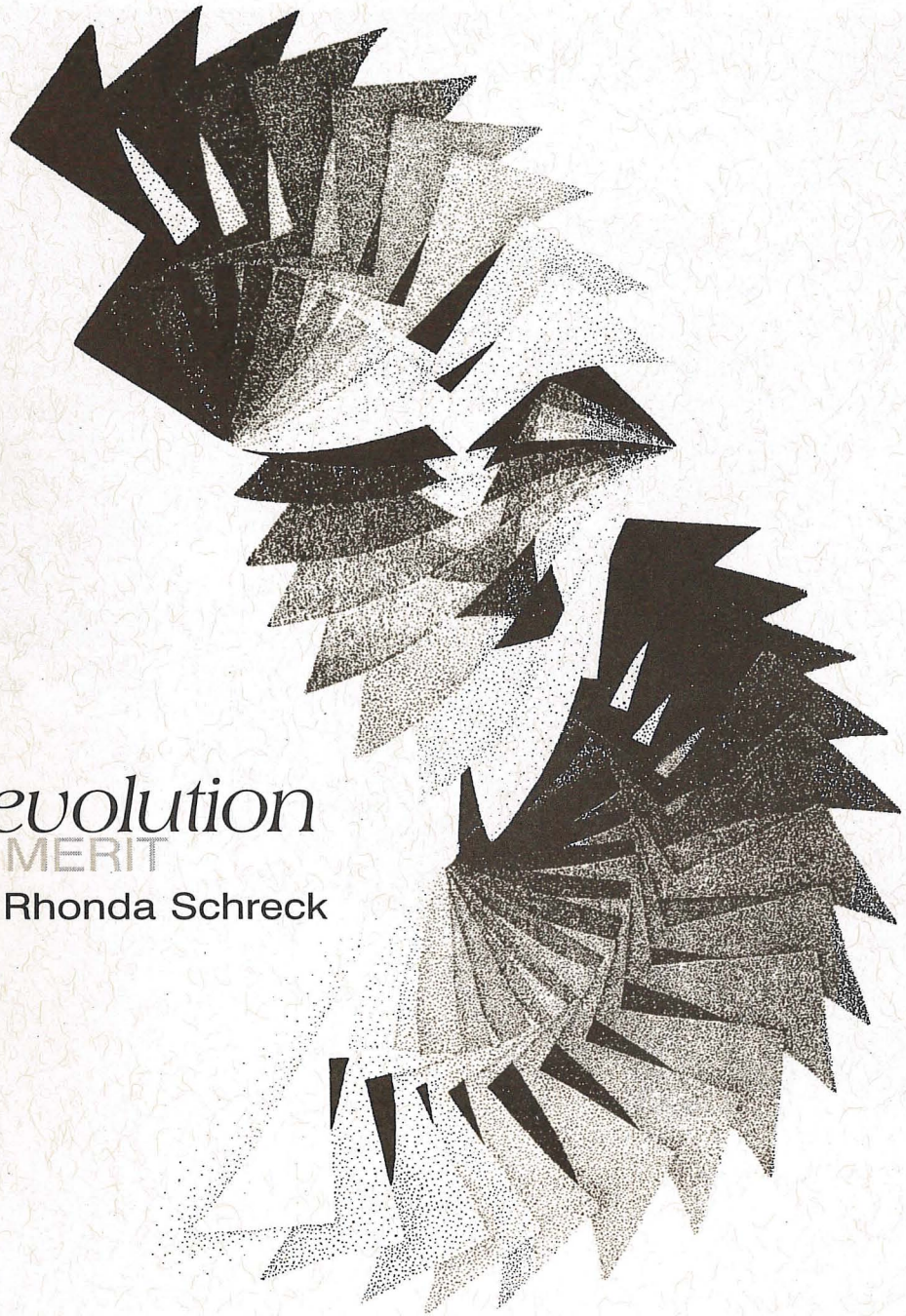
AUTHORS TABLE OF CONTENTS

amy griffor	Immortal Beloved	81
alecia haney	Depot	22
heather herrmann-miller	VanGogh (Self Portrait)	30
	Deeply Matted Girl	98
	The Walk	87
	For Eponine	61
	German Class, So Far	106
	Images	70
	Just When	67
	Loving Picasso	96
	Writing the Dead-An Essay in Letter Form	49
	Second Serving	68
	The Whole Time	82
	The Fall	25
bonnie sue kalmar	Rat Face	35
	As Seen On House of Style	72
sarah kautzman	Politics, War and Third Grade	76
margaret kearns	The Hunt	88
shawn o'grady	Untitled	33
jason preston	Peace and Quiet	57
	My Childhood	21
mary quantz	Coming of Age	54
	Distance and Desire	93
	The Soul of the Poet	36
elaine robb	Muse	75
	Garage Weeps with Wet Eyelashes; Then Grins	45
	That Can't-Get-It-All-Done, Cramped-up Feeling	62
linda rowe	Lois the Barbarian	94
barbara treadaway	Grandpop's Christmas Card	101

Patterns

AUTHORS' TABLE OF CONTENTS

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alecia haney	Depot	22
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	Distance and Desire	93
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barbara treadway	Grandpop's Christmas Card	101



evolution revolution

SELECTION OF MERIT

Rhonda Schreck



liquid tool

SELECTION OF MERIT

Danielle M. Hunt

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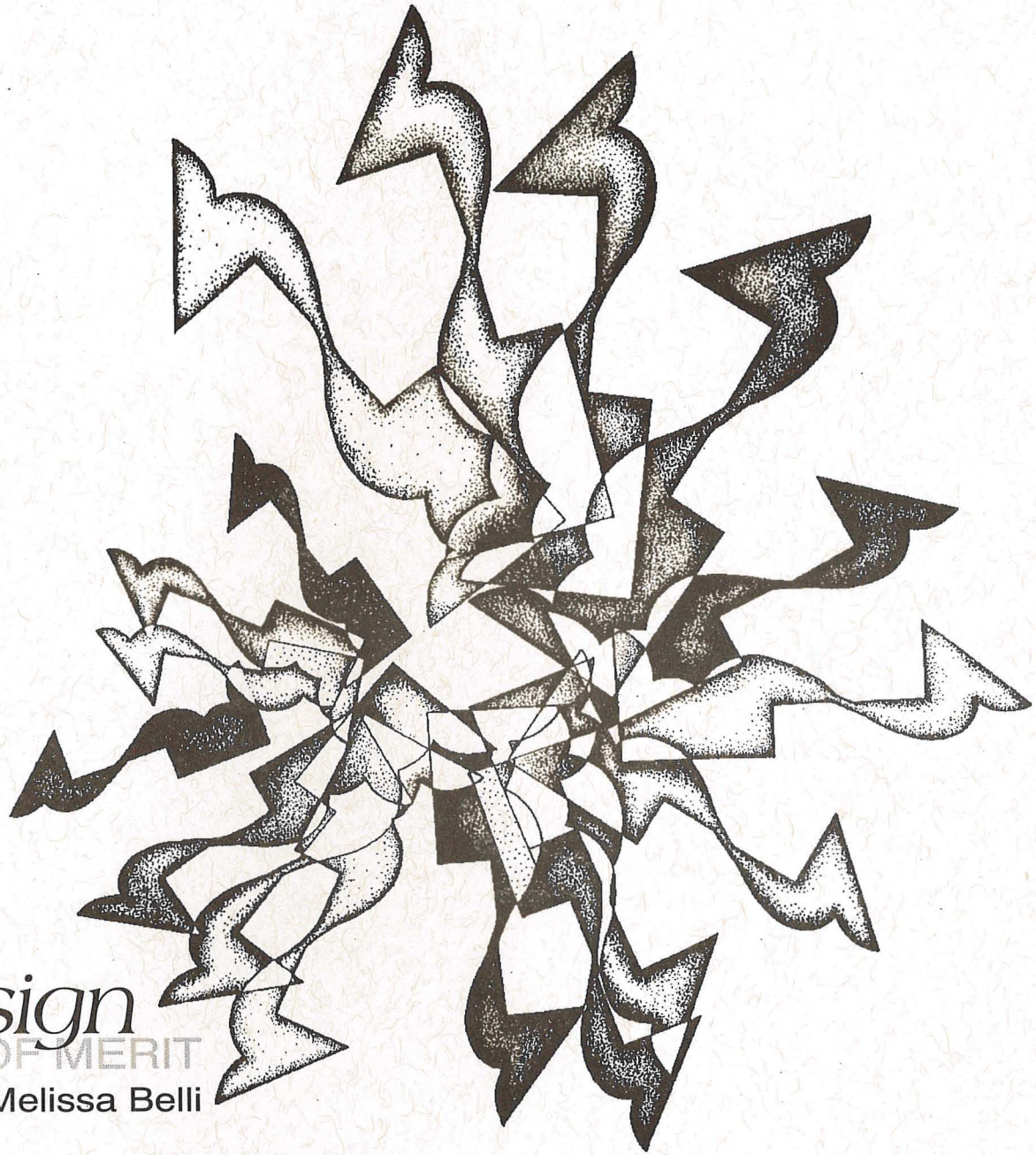
ARTISTS TABLE OF CONTENTS

melissa belli	Skull	99
	Design	11
yukimi fujisawa	Maple Leaf 2	47
	Maple Leaf 5	65
	Sewing Machine I	23
jessica genaw	A Girl's Best Friend	111
lindsay hayosh	Telluric Silence	73
danielle hunt	Choppers	91
	Liquid Tool	8
patra luangsuwan	Circular Illusion	3
	Different Dimensions	85
brandon lee manuilow	The Narrow Gate	59
	The Log In Your Eye	15
donnie riehl	Boba Fett	79
	Victorian Inn	55
rhonda schreck	Tension	31
	Jucier	107
	Evolution Revolution	7
jennifer weymouth	Olivia	43
	Dark Doorway	19

patterns

ARTISTS' TABLE OF CONTENTS

melissa belli Skull 99
Design 11
yukimi fujisawa Maple Leaf 2 47
Maple Leaf 5 65
Sewing Machine I 23
jessica genaw A Girl's Best Friend 111
lindsay hayosh Telluric Silence 73
danielle hunt Choppers 91
Liquid Tool 8
patra luangsuwan Circular Illusion 3
Different Dimensions 85
brandon lee manuilow The Narrow Gate 59
The Log In Your Eye 15
donnie riehl Boba Fett 79
Victorian Inn 55
rhonda schreck Tension 31
Lucier 107
Evolution Revolution 7
jennifer weymouth Olivia 43
Dark Doorway 19



design

SELECTION OF MERIT

Melissa Belli

RICHARD COLWELL AWARD All of the entries for this year's Colwell award showed great promise, which made for good reading - and a difficult decision. The award is given annually to a student who takes a chance with a story and succeeds, and that is why I selected "The Fall" as this year's winner. The story, a first-person account told in short sections, moves clearly and skillfully between childhood memories and an adult's difficult present, and each serves to illuminate the other. The narrator has just suffered through a miscarriage, and her childhood friend, Rachel, has just had a baby. The voice is consistent and true, and seems perfectly suited to the story. With remarkable compression, "The Fall" gives us a rare glimpse of a defining moment in a young woman's life.
- J.D. Dolan

BLANCHE REDMAN AWARD "Just When" succeeds in every aspect of the Redman guidelines: structure, rhythm, tone, and imagery, delivering a pure emotional hit and undiminished by its evidence of craft. The poet's narrative is clear and well-delivered, studded with beautiful little gems of imagery and metaphor - the kids singing into wooden spoon microphones, the prickly cactus - that make it original and true. "Just When" is a poem that really stays with the reader. It's active with sound, sight, and sense; the speaker appeals to us in a genuine voice, and we take this as an invitation to step inside the poem and stand directly in its emotional center. **- Pamela Gemin**

patterns
AWARD WINNERS

ELEANOR MATHEWS AWARD It is the business of the writer to catch what the rest of us have missed, and to do it in a way that makes us sit up and pay attention. A writer manages to get our attention – to "rouse us with a blow to the head," as Franz Kafka would have it – by giving us what we've missed in a way we immediately recognize as true, while realizing we've never thought of it quite that way before. This paradoxical quality of recognition and surprise is a requirement of excellent writing, and is at the heart of Heather Miller's work. She brings us seemingly ordinary bits of life – a walk on the beach, lunch with a friend – in ways that we've never seen them, giving those experiences a depth and meaning we might otherwise have missed. Her work speaks to the dualities of human existence – that a person can move on but never get away ("Writing the Dead"), or that seemingly intimate ties can be easily severed ("German Class, So Far"). But these large issues come to us in those bits we might otherwise have missed, like the "voices skidding across a silent silver lake" in "Deeply Matted Girl." These images, carefully wrought, strike us with their power.

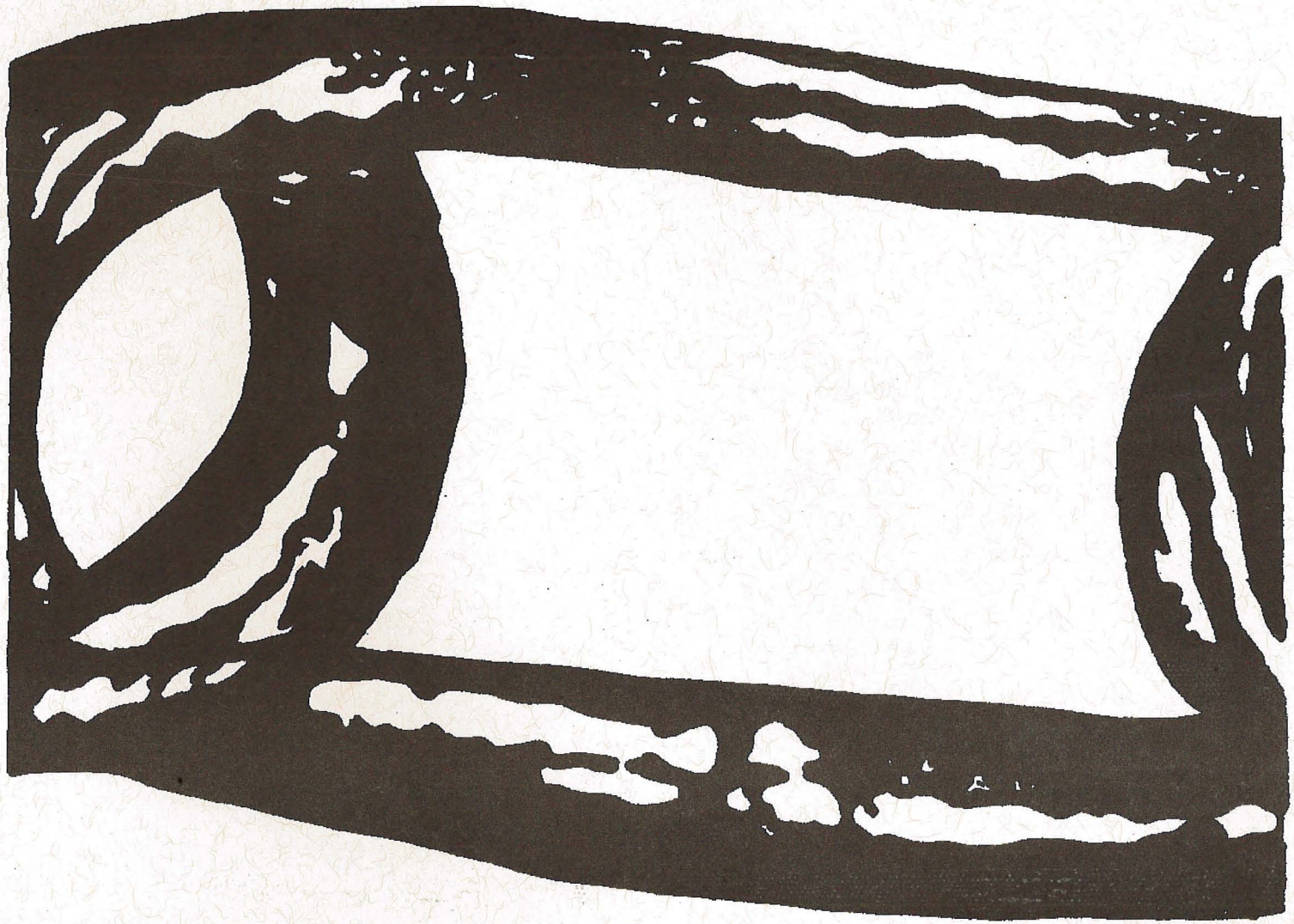
That kind of effect is what the Eleanor Mathews Award is all about. Professor Mathews believed that literature's impact came from both the writer's imagination *and* discipline. Susanna Defever, Professor Emeritus and colleague of Eleanor Mathews, says that her friend "did not think creativity alone was enough; it did not allow people to be free-wheeling with any kind of language." And Heather Miller possesses both imagination and discipline in abundance. She writes draft after draft, changing and polishing, to produce a single poem. And her imagination is abundant, as evidenced in the essay, poems, and stories that appear in the pages of this magazine.

And because Eleanor Mathews was not only a professor but also a journalist and poet, the award named for her is also given to the writer who is prolific, and has, in the words of Susanna Defever, "good command of the creative process, not in one field but in multiple fields." Last year Heather published six poems in *Patterns;* this year's edition features eight of her poems, an essay, and three short stories. Because *Patterns* features so many excellent writers, that so much of Heather's work appears is a tribute to just how powerfully her work affects us. She has caught what we might have missed, and she has done it in ways that do not let us forget.

the log in your eye

SELECTION OF MERIT

Brandon Lee Manuilow



patterns
AWARD WINNERS

As the recipient of the **PATRICK BOURKE AWARD** for an outstanding Visual Arts student Lindsay Hayosh has quietly exhibited the characteristics of an "artist". She has questioned, explored, challenged, contemplated, ruminate, worried, worked, reworked. This process has all been related to the discovery of "self" of finding out who she is, what she has to say, and how best to say it. For Lindsay this year has been a year of "finding":

of finding the right courses to take
of finding new tools and materials
of finding how much work it takes to meet
her standards of perfection
of finding that an idea explored isn't always
complete and
perhaps never will be complete

Yet, as a student of "ART", she is always looking for the time that it takes to explore and savor the next idea.

Lindsay Hayosh knows that the visual arts will be her life and that the future for her is filled with possibilities and speculation because for her "creative" isn't the solution. It is the process and as long as she is working she will continue to renew the creative spirit within her soul.

patterns
AWARD WINNERS

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dark doorway

SELECTION OF MERIT

Jennifer Weymouth

my childhood

SELECTION OF MERIT

Jason Preston

The clock that hung in my parents' living room during my youth exists now only in my mind's eye. It was about one and one-half feet wide and two and one-half feet tall. The clock's body was made of a dark, brown plastic, molded into shapes such as ledges and columns. The face was a gold-colored metal in the center and silver-colored metal on the outside where the Roman numerals were painted in black. There were only minute and hour hands on the clock. They were a black metal formed into a sort of lattice. The pendulum hung from what looked like an oversized popsicle stick that began in an opening behind the face and moved through a square chamber. The back and sides of the chamber were lined with red velvet and the front was constructed of four faux wood columns. Its pendulum was a gold-colored, slightly flattened sphere of plastic about four inches across with two rings of oak leaves, one surrounding the other, stamped into it. Exiting the bottom of the clock at the center of the body was a clear electrical cord, through which the copper wiring could be seen.

What made this clock so special to me? Why do I remember it so fondly? It was the collection of memories associated with the parts of the clock. The Roman numerals made it special: the only other clock I knew which had Roman numerals was Big Ben in London. I remember tracing the patterns of the lattice on the hands of the clock with my eyes to pass the time when I was a bored kid on a rainy day. Inside the clockworks behind the face I once found a buffalo nickel, so worn the year couldn't be read, which became one of my childhood treasures. I remember being yelled at more than once for reaching through the columns into the red velvet chamber and arresting the pendulum in its path. "Jason! You keep your hands out of there!" Either of my parents would say (they were quite interchangeable during that situation) "What do you want to do? Break the clock?" My answer would be no and I'd stop until they had left the room and the scolding left my short-term memory then I would begin again. I couldn't break that clock. Nothing could, or so I thought.

When I was in eighth grade the pendulum stopped working, but the clock still kept time so it stayed up. When I was in tenth grade and working at my first job, the gears started to slightly grind; it soon worsened and sounded like the wheezing of an asthmatic coal miner who smokes. A few months after graduating from high school, during my first months of service in the Army, the clock finally died and was unceremoniously tossed on our burn pile. I thought it was an unfitting burial for the death of a piece of my childhood coinciding with the death of my childhood.

depot

SELECTION OF MERIT

Alecia Haney

An old man,
I saw him once,
walking right - limped
down deserted rusted railroads.
He wore dull gray slacks,
a reflection of the Depression
as though he not only lived it then
but has not yet left.

The air is cold
in Bristol this year,
snow drizzles,
dropping, dripping,
to the ground
Yet he wears only
an aged white tee shirt.

On his face
He wore a never-changing expression,
almost a non-expression.
The wrinkles cut deep
into his leathered skin

He looks as though
he hasn't smiled
or been smiled upon in years
I'd shake his hand
in Southern hospitality
if he held it not
limply at his heart
as if saluting life
not worth saluting.
And I wonder,
yes, still, I wonder.



sewing machine I

SELECTION OF MERIT

Yukimi Fujisawa

the fall

COLWELL AWARD

Heather Herrmann-Miller

The late September sun streaked the backyard where we stood, side by side, plucking beans and sugar peas from where they grew, straight and tall and green, out of the wheelbarrow we had planted them in.

"The thing I don't understand," I said as I snapped a five inch yellow string bean from its vine, "is why you keep taking these jobs for us."

"What do you mean?" she answered, her brow furrowed, green eyes squinted since she refused to wear the glasses she needed.

I flopped my hair out of my eyes. "You don't even like the kids we watch." I was thirteen, tall for my age, my hair straight and butt-length, my eyes steely gray.

She giggled. "I don't *not* like them" she responded. "You just like them better than I do."

"I tolerate them better", I corrected her, winking at my younger sisters who peaked their heads around the corner at us. I motioned for them to come near, and handed each some vegetables. "Go show mom." They scampered off.

"See," Rachel said.

"I'm just used to little kids being around."

She sighed "We're baby-sitting Tracy's kids."

"No."

"What do you mean, 'no'?"

"I mean, her house is disgusting."

"I'll clean it."

"You shouldn't have to clean her house. You did it last time. Remember the dried pizza on the kitchen floor?"

"That's why she pays us so well. Come on, say you will."

"I'll think about it."

Crying, in the dark, a soft whine from the makeshift bed next to mine. I rub a fist at my face, squint at the blaring red digits on the Snoopy Alarm Clock. I am eight and Rachel is six. She is spending the night at my house for a week. Yesterday, I couldn't stop jumping around and asking how much longer it would be before she arrived. Tonight I am not so sure I'm excited. I ask her what it is that she wants.

"Water."

"Go back to sleep."

"My throat is dry," she says. "I can't."

"You're fine," I tell her. "Sleep will make you forget about it." The numbers blink 1:19 at me. I roll over. She continues her crying until my mother gets up and takes care of her. I shrug under heavy blankets. I think Rachel is acting like a baby. My mom had the flu last week. I can't remember anyone in particular being extra nice to me because of it.

Gray November light filters into my room. The people in my house are trying not to bother me. They are whispering, they are setting glasses back into cupboards softly, they are closing doors by twisting handles slowly and gently, pushing until wood meets wood. I am upstairs in bed, under the flannel sheets my husband bought because he thought they might make me feel better. The bed and its dressings hold me better than he knows how, better than anyone knows how, the dents and weight of my body puddling into the mattress, the bed a soft cupped hand slipping up around me.

I pull the sheets off of me, kick them angrily onto the floor. I turn my pillow over, wet where my face was resting. I use my toes to pull off first my right sock, then my left. I am warm, sweat beading along my skin. I pull most of my clothes off and turn over. Let those people downstairs believe I am still asleep.

The phone rings. I answer and as she says "Hello," I know it is her, know because she sounds like she is thirteen again, calling me with another baby-sitting job. I know even though I never went to her wedding, even though she moved away and never came to mine.

She says we should do something together. She asks if I still like to camp. I tell her I never really liked camping, but yes, I still on occasion go. We make plans for the Upper Peninsula. She tells me it's beautiful. I have never been there but something inside of me stirs. Crimson, orange, and gold leaves and the smell of woodsmoke

and pine might do more to help me than anyone else had.

We talk for awhile. We still have a lot in common. I laugh. I relax.

"I have to tell you something," she says, she is out of breath and I know what she is going to say before she tells me. "Jake and I are having a baby."

The room spins and I feel sick and for a moment I consider hanging up the phone, acting like I lost the connection with her. I wonder what I am supposed to say, how I am supposed to acknowledge her news without sounding like I am feeling sorry for myself. She asks if Michael and I plan to have children.

"I just lost..." I begin, but I don't know whether it is proper to say *a* baby or *my* baby.

She begins to cry on the other end of the phone. She apologizes and explains herself. People feel they have to justify their pregnancies to me now. I congratulate her, dismiss her comments. My voice is flat. She babbles on.

"No, really," I say, tapping into all the strength I have, "I am so happy for you. Tell me everything." And tentatively, she begins, step by step, and we are gossiping and laughing and talking sex like all those years ago, things are the same and things are different. I pick at my nails while she speaks. I promise I'll see her in a week.

Three days later I have my husband, Michael, call and cancel. He tells her I am sick. He is not lying.

One of kids we're baby-sitting has thrown up. I am grossed out and leave the room. I can't bring myself to clean it, can't bring myself to bathe the kid and put him to bed. I busy myself with the other two children. Rachel hums Cody to sleep.

"It was just a bad bottle," she explains to me.

"What the hell is a 'bad bottle'?"

"It was just a bad mix, that's all," she giggles and wipes up vomit. Tonight, we won't split the money. Tonight, I give her my share.

I feel warm all the time. I kick blankets off of my side of the bed. I walk around in mostly no clothing but when my husband looks at me suggestively I tell him I am tired, I complain of a headache, I use excuses that have worked for other women for years. I cannot bear the thought of his body over my own, of how warm that would be, how twisted the sheets beneath us would become.

I buy a new wardrobe. My shirts are low-cut and tight on my breasts. I get my belly-button pierced. My belly is not distended, not hard, not round and proud with motherhood. It is soft and flat and so I decorate it. I get a small black widow spider tattooed on my ankle. I chop my hair to bobbing just below my ears. I am not a mom, so I refuse to look like what I believe one should.

Rachel calls and invites us for dinner. I hear her daughter babble in the background. I want to ask how her daughter is doing but I never bothered to learn her name so I search for the crumpled birth announcement in my desk drawers. When I find it it tells me her name: Megan. I ask How Megan is doing. Rachel says fine and switches subjects. She asks what we are bringing for food, she asks if we like to play cards.

I am laying in my bed. I figure if I don't move, I won't hurt. I figure if I don't hurt, I won't bleed. If I can stop the bleeding, if I can hold myself tightly enough, I can protect my baby. The pain comes again, riveting up my thighs and into my belly. I squeeze my eyes shut and reach for my drink. I gulp down half a glass of luke-warm tap water. The doctor tells me liquids will help. I look down. The bed beneath me is stained.

I hug Rachel when I see her. She says she likes my haircut. I don't show her my navel piercing. I cover my T-shirts up with Michael's flannel shirts. Rachel's daughter looks nothing like her. I want her to like me. I give the toddler a giant stuffed animal dog. For the flicker of a moment I am afraid Megan will scream, that the dog will scare her, that she'll throw it down. Her face explodes into a smile, then she buries her head into her mom's shoulder.

Rachel apologizes. I ask her for what.

"I feel guilty for calling you right when, well, you know."

"My miscarriage?" The words come out of my mouth but it is not my voice, it is colder, calmer.

"Yes, I, I didn't mean..."

"I'm fine." I smile at her when she acts like she doesn't believe me.

"I just remember when my mom lost her baby," she continues, and my body stiffens, and my smile fades. I am not sure what she is talking about. She continues, unaware of any facial changes on my part.

"You know," she says to me, "You think I would remember something about *her*, the way she looked or something, being she was six months along. But I don't." Her voice gets softer. "I only remember coming over to your house. I was so little. But you let me sleep in your room, and..." She falters for a moment. I only remembered how I refused to get out of bed and get her something to drink. Fresh guilt sweeps over me and I let it linger, despite what my therapist has told me.

She asks if I will hold Megan for her while she heads off to the bathroom.

"Sure," I answer quickly, and hold out my hands.

Megan looks as if she is not thrilled with the decision her mother and I have made, but she lets me take her out of her mother's arms. Her mother walks away. When she does I catch a whiff of her smell. She smells the same as always: fabric softener and Aussie brand hair spray. Megan squirms in my arms. Her eyes grow round and tear filled.

"Come on," I say to her and walk into the backyard. "Let's go count trees." Megan isn't sure, but her curiosity is peaked, so she humors me. Gravel crunches under my untied leather boots. The leaves on the trees have burst into flames: gold, crimson and orange blaze at us under an early evening September sky.

I point at a birch tree. "One," I say.

Then a maple. "Two."

Then a pine tree. "Three."

The oak tree is fourth. The beech tree is fifth. Megan calms and doesn't take her eyes off of the trees. I am half afraid I have scared her, marred her for life somehow, her slender leg pressing against my empty belly, pushing the metal of my piercing into my skin. Her tiny fingers are turning pink and cold. I press then into my palm and begin counting and pointing again. Rachel is headed back our way. Megan looks at her mother. I am afraid she will begin to whine, to cry, to pull out of my arms and reach for Rachel, but instead, she looks back at the woods, lifts her arm and extends a miniature index finger.

"Whatcha doing?" Rachel asks in a sing-song voice. She sounds like her mother. I shiver and realize I am cold for the first time in over a year.

"We're just counting trees," I answer her, and Rachel turns and stands next to me as we both stare into the winding and knotted wood before us.

vangogh (self-portrait)

SELECTION OF MERIT

Heather Herrmann-Miller

VanGogh knew and longed to join:
that cult that doesn't return to inform the rest of us -
those still alive and forcing harsh, jagged gulps of reality
down windpipes.

Dehydrated worms gray the sidewalk
where I stand.
Plucked clean off the cement
they flap like paper in fingers,
as do the dead underneath a mortician's hands.

Time sucks life-juices away
with each tick of the clock,
the madness of movements that rock,
rock, rocked VanGogh as he
tipped his brush in colors,
whetting horsehair with his tongue:

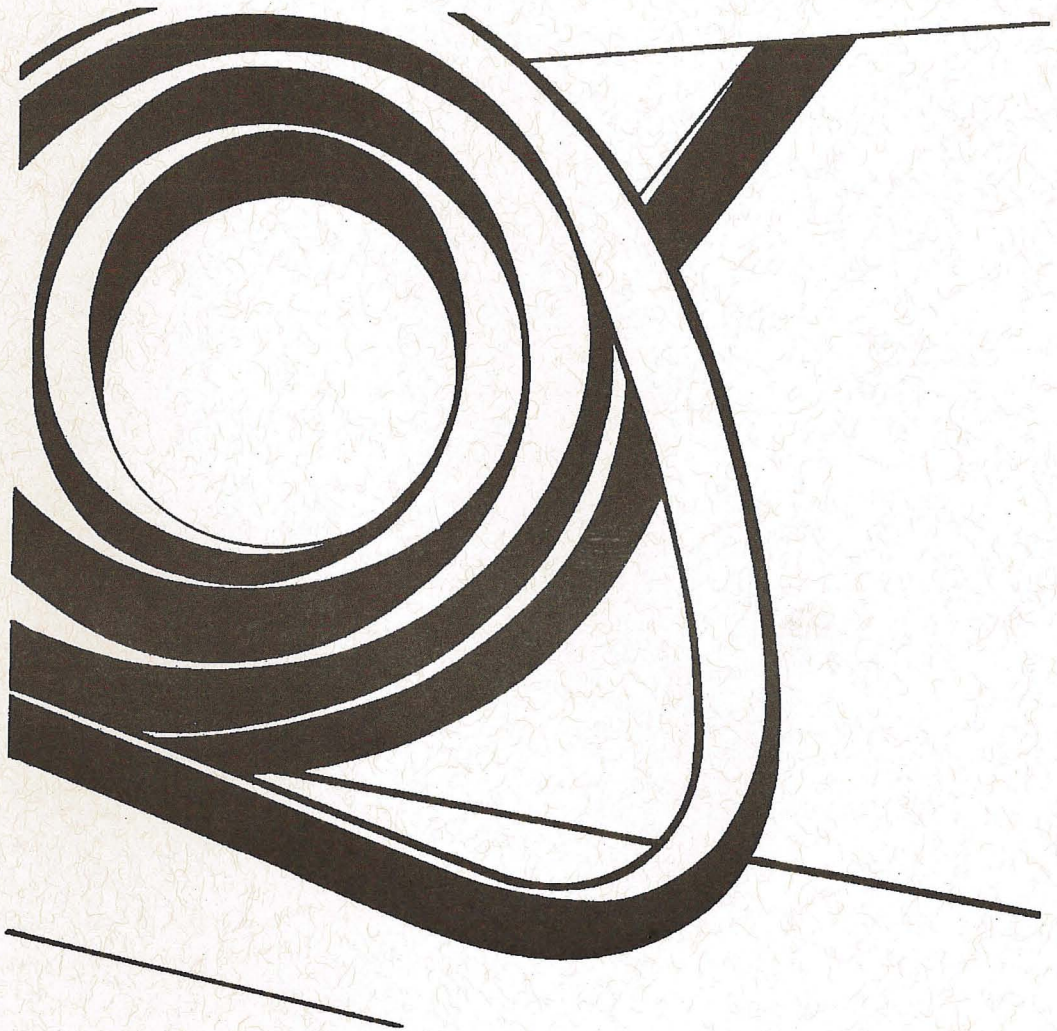
blacks and reds and blues
smearing across his face,
making him that man of gray,
that waxy shell,
that piece of ear-flesh on the floor
lest he hear anymore,
like them,
the dead.

The voices that begged him to join their silence,
their stillness under the earth,
the only blackness an earthworm needs.

tension

SELECTION OF MERIT

Rhonda Schreck



untitled

FIRST PLACE ESSAY

Shawn M. O'Grady

At 15, my cousin was, as my mother always said, a mean little kid. I was about 12 when my cousin casually handed me her old training bra, indicating that it was time I wear one. I felt blind-sided as if someone had taken off with my childhood. Wait! I wasn't through with it! My cousin, seeing my reluctance of wearing such a thing, chased me through her house. She persisted in ridiculing my fear of oncoming adolescence. Over and over she questioned my refusal to wear her old bra. An old, used bra that had no shape, no color. I locked myself in the bedroom and cried. When I finally came out from the bedroom, the odd hand-me-down training bra was hanging relentlessly on the doorknob.

I felt, ashamed to be growing up. Ashamed of my own sexuality becoming evident. I would become embarrassed at any profane reference to breasts. Boobs, hooters, tits. I didn't like to say the word *nipple*. It was a word that was difficult to pass through my lips. Like penis and vagina. I disliked the way my mother would say BRA-H-H as if she's taking a big bite of something. I would lower my pitch when I said the word *bras*.

I never did accept the "training" bra. Its only function was to show those who would notice me that I was not a little girl and not an adult. I was in-between. I couldn't be a Tom boy with Dad any longer and I wasn't yet a grown up. I was a 32A and felt foolish for even wearing a bra. I was so small I didn't really need one. But not wearing one meant I was averse to growing up. Girls in school who wore them appeared well-adjusted. It seemed they never even thought about wearing a bra. They never appeared bashful in the locker room. I, on the other hand, refused to wear a bathing suit for swimming and subsequently failed two semesters of Phys. Ed. I never did learn to swim. Some girls filled out their tight sweaters with dignity. These girls had somehow reached womanhood with no problem. I soon purchased a pretty white satin bra at K-Mart and wore it every day.

My predicament throughout middle school and high school was that a 32A would flatten what little figure I had and a 32B was too spacious, leaving lax fabric at the tip of the cups. The folds in the cup indicated that I hadn't "filled out." I wasn't grown-up. But not wearing one was no longer an option. Going bra-less meant something quite different than being a child. And reputations were easily spoiled at that age.

Untitled

FIRST PLACE ESSAY

Shawn M. O'Grady

My senior prom. I couldn't afford to buy a new dress so I borrowed a prom dress made of lavender chiffon with clean lines and capped sleeves. Fabric draped across the bodice in folds. It tied into a bow at the back accenting my slim waistline. I knew there was no way I would ever fill out the bodice. Taking two egg-shaped foam inserts, I pinned them into the bra of the dress. I went from a petite girl to a young lady. And for the first time in my life, I felt sexy. My dress was borrowed and part of me was fake but I felt just as pretty as the girls who could afford to buy the southern belle hoop skirts that were so popular that year.

Throughout my twenties, my physical shape remained basically the same. Thanks to Victoria's Secret, I found wearing bras sexy. I wore matching bra and panty sets of wonderful colors and fabrics. My underwear drawer became a rainbow of lingerie. Panty and bra sets of Leopard spots or LaFleur filled my sock drawer. I purchased silk stockings and garter belts, satin corsets, pink camisoles and lacy thigh-highs. But like the movies, it was all just show. The padded bras hid what was underneath: my small breasts with areolas that always seemed too big.

The recent birth of my child gave way to an increased breast size. In the last month of my pregnancy I had to purchase the dreaded nursing bra. 100% cotton. All white with front flaps and plastic hooks for "easy access." The picture of the woman on the box had blonde hair and white teeth and didn't look pregnant at all. I felt my ankles beginning to swell so I bought two boxes of the same white 100% cotton bras and left the store. I tried one on when I got home. It felt like an Ace bandage wrapped around me. I dropped the flap and exposed my ever-increasing areola. I spent good money on this wise elastic ban of 100% cotton. All white. 36B. I finally reached a 36B. I laid on my bed and cried.

The lactation specialist held my nipple firmly between her thumb and index finger and tickled my newborn's mouth with it until be turned his head and suckled my slightly enlarged breast. For three days he sipped colostrum. He was content being in my arms and nursing was the most natural thing between us two. He didn't seem to mind the size of my breast. Three days later my milk came in. While feeding my son during the night, the milk would not cease. I filled my son's ear as he feverishly tried to latch onto the breast of his mother who was running about in search of anything to hold

against her other spraying breast to sop up the milk. I stood in the middle of the living room, damning my enormous, milk-filled breasts and detesting 100% cotton bras with flaps and feeling resignation towards the cold milk that dribbled down my sides soaking the bedding.

My body was tempered as has my attitude. I've heard a baby changes one's life and I've heard all the negatives of how baby changes a woman's body. I am fortunate, however, that the birth of my child put my view of my body in a positive light. My breasts aren't as pert as when they were smaller and I now have the silvery stretch marks that I swore my entire life I would never get. Even at the expense of remaining childless. But the exchange is glorious. I view my body, my entire body, as God's magnificent design. Created, all of us, to serve a purpose. My breasts have changed through the years. I have changed through the years. I will continue to change and accept.

rat face

SELECTION OF MERIT

Bonnie Sue Kalmar

I never dared tell anyone that I laid awake at night
thinking about kissing you.
I called you Rat Face.
Sharp nose, knotted blond ponytail, twig legs.
But somewhere in four years you were lost
and barely found
by me.
Your long hair gone, your levi's filled out,
and your nose not so sharp as before.
I still lay awake at night
waiting to kiss you.

the soul of the poet

SELECTION OF MERIT

Mary L. Quantz

For little Eddie McKenzie being weaned from the breast was a traumatic affair. At three and a half Eddie had already nursed longer than either his brother or sister; and his proprietary interest in his mother's bosom was certainly beyond anything his father found acceptable. In fairness though, Eddie did not depend only on his mother's milk and kindness for total sustenance. Most mornings he would refuse the breast in favor of cartoons and cornflakes. Lunch always had to match Soupy's menu; and afternoons it was graham crackers and grape juice. At night however, he climbed on to his mother's lap, hung his legs from the side of the rocking chair, and settled back for a digestif.

It was without preamble or fanfare that Mrs. McKenzie finally decided to pull the plug on little Eddie. Sunday night and Bonanza was on the television; Eddie, in saggy training pants, with Lone Ranger holsters slung over his straight little cowboy hips, pushed his mother toward the rocking chair. Mrs. McKenzie resisted. Eddie persisted. It had been a long day. For both of them. Eddie, being younger, and having more reserves on which to draw, might have won that day had his father not looked at him just then, and admitted out loud, that the kid was weird, and gave him the willies.

Mrs. M. stopped to look at her husband. She stood there, eyes narrowed, hands on her hips, elbows angled out sharply, considering him, while Eddie pushed at her knees and cranked his whining up a notch. Mr. McKenzie knew that look. He tried a shrug, then a weak and silly grin that slowly melted from his face. He shrank back in his chair, suddenly captivated by Dinah Shore's invitation to see the USA in a Chevrolet. After a long silent moment, Mrs. McKenzie grabbed Eddie up and dropped him in his father's lap. He and his father exchanged looks of pure astonishment. Eddie could not remember ever having been in his father's lap. For a moment he was too surprised to react. When his mother walked away from the rocking chair and sat instead on the scratchy camelback sofa, Eddie was stunned.

He scrambled down and launched himself at his mother. She caught him by the shoulders, stopping him mid-dive, and turned him around. She picked him up and placed him on the

sofa beside her. What Eddie wanted was soft and comfortable. What he got was horsehair and chafing. He tried again to climb onto his mother's lap. With her arms tightly crossed in front of her, and her bony elbows forming an unbreachable cordon, Eddie was locked out.

Defeated, he sat back and looked up at his mother. He took a shuddering breath. Three short and rapid breaths followed, revving the engine; one more deep, deep breath - and Eddie bayed. He fisted his hands, screwed his face into a purple mask, dropped his head back, opened his mouth and wailed. That howl served as a reference for his family from that point on. No sound was ever as horrible as the one Eddie made when he was forced to give up the breast.

That was the last sound Eddie made. Doctors could not find anything wrong with him. Dragging Mr. McKenzie along, Mrs. M. searched for the specialist that could tell her why her youngest child could not or would not speak. All the tests they performed showed Eddie was physically capable of speech. When doctors learned that Eddie had been talking since he was eighteen months old they assured his parents that when he was ready, he would talk again. They felt that he would eventually forget about whatever it was that made him quit talking, and in the normal course of events he would just start up again, mid-sentence. Their advice to the McKenzies was to go home and wait; treat him normally, and when he was ready he would talk.

It seemed to Eddie's sister and brother that his silence was an avenue that merited exploration. When their parents were out of the room they could grab his toys, or candy, or change the channel on the TV, and he would say nothing. What stopped them from stripping Eddie of all his possessions were the god-awful faces he would make. Seeing his Hershey Bar being popped into his brother's mouth would send Eddie into an absolute paroxysm of facial gymnastics and contortions. In total silence his face would darken to a dusky blue; the muscles in his cheeks and forehead would knot and ripple, his mouth would maw open with saliva free-falling from the center of it. His eyes would roll up until only white showed, and huge tears would mix with the snot from his nose and drip off his chin. Even for children raised on Boris Karloff and Lon Chaney, that face was too much. They left him alone.

The specialists felt that Eddie would be more likely to resume his speech habits if he was around other youngsters who talked. Every day he climbed on the full-size yellow bus and went to school. He only had to pull that awful face a few times before word got around the playground and he was left pretty much alone. Teachers would try, at the beginning of each school year, to get Eddie to talk, but by the time the class was tracing their hands to make Thanksgiving turkeys they would realize that Little Eddie was not going to choose this class for his verbal debut. He did his work quietly and well, and they forgot about him, also quietly and well. Year after year they checked the little box that promoted him to the next grade.

Eddie learned well. He advanced through grade school and high school. He developed a sort of shorthand of expressions and gestures that allowed limited communication. He had a few friends, those patient enough to learn his facial patois, and even, although seldom enough to be considered rare, a few dates. He always went to the movies with these dates. The mandated silence observed in theaters made Eddie's silence seem less awkward, less noticeable. An additional benefit to the movies as a date destination was the darkness of the theater. Eddie did not speak, but his face was never able to keep its opinion to itself. Struggling to communicate his feelings to his date his face would work frantically. When viewed in full light, the physical mechanics of Eddie's need to express himself could appear so alarming to the young lady that a second date would be quite out of the question. Eddie held out little hope of ever rounding the bases with any of the young ladies of his acquaintance.

When he was old enough to go to bars, Eddie's romantic fortunes took an occasional turn for the better. Last call would sometimes find him in the company of women who felt that his silence was stoic, if not downright heroic. One-hundred proof mellowed they would see in Eddie the image of, for the older ones, Gary Cooper, for the younger, Clint Eastwood. They would take their silent film star home for a night of wordless communion. Eddie was always happy to oblige. The trouble was that at high noon he couldn't tell them they had made his day. The silence after the loving was too unnerving for many of these women, and they very seldom returned for another roundup.

Mr. McKenzie had remained distantly interested in Eddie's welfare, possibly out of guilt. Years before he had unconsciously started to refer to Eddie as Willie. When Mrs. McKenzie pointed this out to him he tried to break the habit. It was no good. The kid was strange, and to the old man he would always be Willie. He found Eddie a job though, fixing television sets. The part that really tickled the old man was that the owner of the store where Eddie worked was deaf. For some reason it delighted him to think of the two of them working all day, in the dusty little shop, completely silent, while TV's and radios blared around them.

Eddie had a job. He had a few friends. He had the occasional night of what passed for passion. His life had most of the ingredients. It just didn't seem to have any meaning. Right in the middle, where joy should be, he often thought, was a big hole. He needed something to fill up that emptiness. He had tried all the usual anesthetics: alcohol, a little homegrown or

domestic, fast cars, slow women, none of these were whatever it was Eddie felt was missing. He started reading. On his lunch hour he would go the library. He had finished almost the entire philosophy section: Plato, Descartes, Voltaire, Burke, Hegel, Nietzsche, Kant, and even Emerson, looking for answers. He felt filled, but felt no release, no relief. It wasn't until he stumbled across the poetry section one afternoon, and read a few lines of Wordsworth, that he realized that his emptiness couldn't be filled externally. He would have to empty himself first in order to be filled. He would empty himself through poetry. He would write.

During his lunch hour the next day Eddie went to the local community college and signed up for a poetry seminar. He bought the text required for the class, a new five-section notebook, and three fine point black ink pens. He was ready. The first night of class he sat toward the back of the room. Too tall for the desk, he sat angled awkwardly, nearly sideways in his seat. The bony elbows and knees inherited from his mother jutted sharply, at odds with his body. He was a southpaw. His books and papers, spread across his desk, were tipped severely to the right in accommodation. He gave the general appearance of a deck of cards dropped, then hastily scooped up: all angles and sharp edges. The seats around him remained empty as the class started to fill.

Five minutes before the hour the teacher walked into the room. This was not the man originally scheduled to teach the class. The teacher walked to the board, turning her back on the class, and wrote in her best copperplate: Miss Eunice Greeley. While she was writing the students looked at each other and grinned or grimaced, depending on their own aspirations and expectations for this class, and this instructor. Overwhelmingly their reaction to Miss Greeley could not be called favorable. Facing the class again she explained to the students that the other instructor had had a medical emergency and would not be back for the semester - drying out was the general consensus of the students.

Miss Greeley told the class that she didn't mind being pulled out of retirement and pressed into service on such short notice. She admitted that her garden might suffer, and that she would miss the upcoming day-trip to the planetarium with her church group, but all in all she expected they would have a magnificent time exploring the breathtaking world of poetry. She offered all this information, nearly in one breath, as she stood at the front of the room, her tiny hands clasped tightly beneath her enormous bosom.

Of course, when roll was taken Eddie could not answer. He raised his hand. Miss Greeley's head was down, she was squinting through half-glasses hanging from a chain around her neck, and did not see his hand waving from the back of the room. She repeated his name. The

class laughed a little, Eddie waved a little harder. Miss Greeley finally looked up. She looked at Eddie. She remembered his face. She had been his third grade teacher. She called him Edward. For his part, Eddie remembered Miss Greeley. He remembered her well and fondly. She had not changed he thought. Still short and round, built like a little pigeon. Still wearing jersey dresses and sensible black shoes. Still wearing belts impossibly tight and high under breasts that gave rise to unconscious thoughts of battleships steaming out to sea. Everything about her was round and soft, and to Eddie, she looked like comfort in support hose. He remembered that Miss Greeley had not been one of those teachers who gave up early and promoted without thought. They were pleased to see each other again.

To the surprise of most of the class, the poetry seminar turned out to be as wonderful as Miss Greeley had promised. Before they realized it, students were reading and writing really good poetry. What had started as a required class for many of them, one that had to be suffered through, became a source of pleasure and enjoyment. The greatest source of amazement for the class, though not for Miss Greeley, was Eddie. There simply were not enough superlatives to describe his work.

Every student in the class wrote poems. All of them read their work, and had it evaluated by their classmates. They congratulated each other on insights, and offered encouragement when the muse refused. They reserved their highest compliments and praise, however, for Eddie. Each week when Miss Greeley stood at the front of the room, and assumed her poetry-reading stance (feet apart, one hand holding a lace edged hankie, the other holding Eddie's poem) the class would fall silent in expectation.

As she read, Miss Greeley's round little face and body would come to life. Her cheeks, even her lips, would redden. Her eyes sparkled as they ran over the lines of Eddie's poems. Her breathing would quicken. She would touch her lace hankie to her temples, her throat. She was transported by his words. When she finished she would gasp softly as the flush slowly left her skin. Her nostrils flaring, she would tell the students in a husky voice, that here students, here was a poem.

The students agreed. They loved Eddie's work. Even those hardcore few, who until this semester had said pome instead of poem, were moved by the intricacy, the delicacy, and the humanity of Eddie's poems.

As for Eddie, he felt the cup filling. The more he poured into his work, the more he gave up to his writing, the less empty he felt. Hearing Miss Greeley give voice to his words was a nearly delirious joy. He would lean forward in his seat, absolutely rapt as he watched her. Without even being aware of it he silently moved his lips in synch with her voice.

Eddie had fallen a little bit in love with Miss Greeley; after all, she had given his words a voice. Miss Greeley had fallen a little bit in love with Eddie; after all, he had given her another chance at life. Eddie at the back of the room, Miss Greeley at the front- what an unexpectedly lovely couple.

Miss Greeley was aware that Eddie was very close to speaking. She fairly held her breath in anticipation of the act. Each week, at the end of class, he would leave slowly, always lingering by her desk. She could see from his face that he truly wanted to say something to her. Until now she had always spoken for him, much the same as when a stutterer is supplied with the elusive word. He always dropped his shoulders and with a regretful expression walked away.

The last night of the class, only Eddie's work was read; the class was unanimous in this. Eddie's soul, carried on Miss Greeley's voice, filled the room, and touched them all. They laughed, they reflected, they loved, and they grew with each poem. Eddie filled their empty places too. They were better for having known him. They clapped him on the back, or touched his shoulder, or hugged him as they filed out at the end of the night.

As usual Eddie was the last to leave. He took his time, gathering his books and papers, and stopped to look around the room a final time. He tucked his things under his arm and started for the front of the room. Miss Greeley stood at her desk, Eddie's last poem in her hand. Tonight she would not speak for Eddie; tonight she would wait for Eddie to speak.

He stopped at her desk. They looked at each other for a moment. Wordlessly Miss Greeley handed Eddie his final poem. He took it from her without looking at it. His eyes never left her face. She saw him struggling but remained silent. His face worked. Sweat glazed his lip. She had time to wonder what his voice would sound like; rough from years of non-use, or silky, as though kept in velvet for all these years. His eyes dropped from her face, down towards the cameo pinned at her collar, down to the glasses suspended on the chain. His face continued to work. His chest rose and fell rapidly, answered by the heaving of her own. Looking up into her eyes his face relaxed. A smile started at one corner of his mouth and spread delightfully across his face. Slowly his head swung from side to side, his smile, his delight growing as the words were finally freed from his mouth, his throat, his soul: "Geez, Miss Greeley, nice tits."

Scarlet to her soft blue curls, Miss Greeley tottered back on her heels, dropping her hankie. Eddie bent to retrieve it, absently bringing it to his face, inhaling lilacs or verbena or lilies. As Eddie straightened, Miss Greeley recovered and faced him, "Thank You Edward." The third grade teacher had returned. "Your work is commendable. You really must consider publishing in our little poetry magazine." Her face softened, "Especially, 'She Rises Naked Through The Waves', that is quite your best work I think." Eddie grinned and nodded. Shifting his books to his hip, he walked out the door.

It was early. Eddie strolled through the soft spring evening humming a little, the smile still on his face. He realized he was holding Miss Greeley's hankie. Not a problem, she had a radio in the shop that he was working on and he would give it to her when she came in to pick it up. He was already looking forward to seeing her again. His humming broke into full song, a rusty version of "Happy Trails," as he pushed the hankie deep into his pocket. The dimes and nickels there chattered as he touched them. Impulsively his fingers closed around a dime, and he brought it out. Flipping it off his thumb he watched it arch before he caught it in his fist.

Sometimes, in life, things just come together. On the corner where his car was parked was a phone booth. The dime, in mid-arc, dropped into Eddie's hand, and he turned toward the booth. As he pushed open the door, the over-head light flared. The phonebook was chained to the wall; balancing it on his knee he ran his finger down the page until he found the number. With the phone cradled between his ear and shoulder, he fed the dime into the slot, listening to the hollow bonging sound it made as it dropped into the box. He dialed carefully, his finger following the numbers as the wheel spun forward and back. A series of soft clicks sounded in his ear, then ringing, on the fourth ring, the phone was picked up. "Hello?"

"Hi Dad, it's me – Willie."

FIRST

Jennifer Weymouth



garage weeps with wet eyelashes; then grins

SELECTION OF MERIT

Elaine Robb

The garage – a creature from the lagoon,
not unlike a dragon with really big teeth,
and bad breath –
has plagued us all summer, and plagues us still.

"It's not done!" I cry out in my sleep.
And we have kayaks in the dining room.

Our garage, a place to store all stuff –
the plant pots, the lawn mower, the motorcycle Eric no longer rides
"But we *have* to keep it" –
is *not* done.

I cry out, without words,
my arms stretched wide,
feeling jagged, ragged.

I'm flying,
treetop skimming
through lightning and rain ratcheting like
gunfire.

Hummingbirds scatter.

And, and, and
I cannot breathe.

I shudder
at years of 6am in wintertime:
snow, brilliant like diamonds, crusted to the windshield;
me, scraping ice in nightgown, coat and scarf;
the car's defrost humming in predawn emptiness.

I practice square breathing.

"So what will you put in your new garage?" my friend asks.
"Oh," I say, "the new 'old' cement mixer."
"You mean the one you just bought in order to build the garage?"

I smile my most innocent smile,
my eyes dancing the Sardonic, Already-Thought-Of-That-One Tango.
"Yes," I say.
I look at the cement dust cracking on my hands.
Then I raise my chin to the bluest of skies, open my mouth wide, and
laugh.

Have you ever been really, really surprised?
I was, just then, because our
dragon opened its specfangular fangs, and spoke words:

"Come look at this rainbow with me.
It's plunking red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet lights
all over your house,
like a prism,
sparkling."

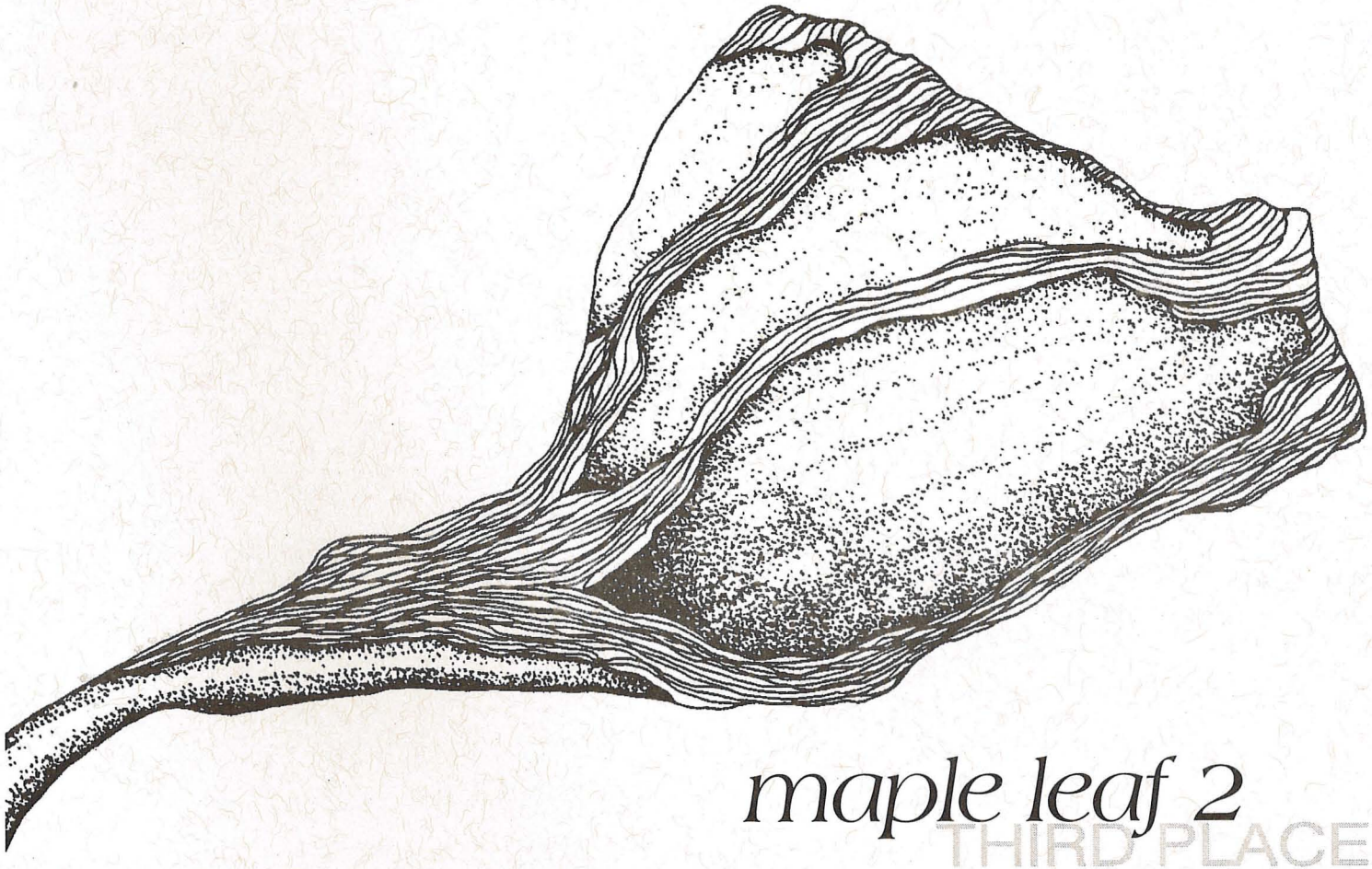
Huh?
Then, I realized:
I have learned wonders.

I have learned to hold a stadia upright,
to balance a transit
via knobs and bubbles;
to accurately measure heights and
locate straight lines through grass and shrub.

I have learned that chunky, rocky aggregate is heavy:
so heavy that it can render earthquake breaks in your lower back
and make a hot bath, at evening's end,
as delicious as rich, chocolaty cocoa.

I have learned to weld:
to heft the helmet, with dark lens
onto my face; to strike an arc
to rebar:

I have learned to make good of bad:
to make silver sparks fly like lightning.



maple leaf 2

THIRD PLACE

Yukimi Fujisawa

writing the dead - an essay in letter form

SELECTION OF MERIT

Heather Herrmann-Miller

I had written the poems that ended with your death in the last, surprising sentence. The Most-Memorable-Time-Of-My-Life and What-I-Did-Last-Summer essays, that very strategically told the story of your suicide, and the ones that used terms like "cried until I could cry no longer" and "my tears watered your grave." They told the story, got the point of despair across, gave Romeo and Juliet a run for their money. I never thought that doing these things would help me get over you; I only thought that it was time to speak about this, time to make the words on the paper explain to me the things no one else ever had.

It was easy to deal with you in terms of paper and ink. It was easy to distribute the proper emotions, the right regrets, the absolution, in an arena that could be judged sympathetically as well as for literary value. As a writer, I used you every opportunity that I could. I needed my material and you were tirelessly there, motivating me.

There were things I couldn't describe though, things I couldn't make fit into words from only twenty-six characters of the alphabet. The times at night when I woke, sheets soaked, your name escaping my tongue but your smell somehow in the night air. There were the notebooks of poetry that were only for you and I, you never seeing them and me refusing to share. There is the insatiable ache that has never been filled, never been replaced, only temporarily distracted since your departure. These were the things I didn't know how to talk about. These were things that could not be understood by anyone else, could not be properly voiced through pen and ink alone. The one who had understood me the most, who helped create the me that I became, was gone. He was dead.

I never visited your grave, never found out where it was you were buried, because by not doing that some small part of me could hang on to your life. I could believe what my friend Renee whispered in my ear at your funeral, that this was just some big joke that you mastered. I could believe that you would come back to me on the day of my wedding, or at

the birth of my children, or when I hurt, because you would know when it was time to return. So I waited.

I have sat up alone and hurting and watched an empty evening sky darken to velvet without you. When the five year anniversary of your death passed, I watched out my window. And when I walked down the aisle to marry another man, I kept turning my head, waiting for you to charge through the doors, angry at me for abandoning you. When the ten year anniversary of your death came and went, I tried to convince myself that I was only empowered by your demise, that I would always love you but that I had learned from the experience, and could deal with your absence.

My dreams made me a liar. I would wake up, my pillow soaked, and be eager to fall back asleep because even though dreaming those things tore me up inside, those dreams still brought me as close to you as I had gotten in a very long time. The problem I had with the dreams was that I never reached you in them, never even got to run a finger down your blonde cheek. I dreamt that if I could only get the cellular phone in my hand to work, if only my fingers, heavy with dreamsleep, would punch the right combination of numbers, then I would be able to talk to you, you wouldn't really be dead, only gone very far away from me for a very long time. I woke up before the connection was made, the drum of the dial tone roaring with my pulse.

I had to go visit your grave. It was a matter of a few phone calls. But they were phone calls I didn't want to make. Information had the numbers I wanted for the people we had in common. They were home when I called. They were friendly. They knew the location. They called

back and gave me further directions as well as a phone number. You were accessible. It wasn't at all like my dreams full of roadblocks. It was too easy.

I found the cemetery, an hour and a half away from where I currently live, without ever turning around or losing my way. I drove in the open wrought iron gates. I parked the car and tentatively walked toward a building that was either a mosque or an office, I wasn't sure. I opened the door. Someone was there to help me. The only question he asked that caught me off guard was your name. I had to say it aloud. I had to spell it. I almost forgot how to spell your last name, it has been so long since I'd doodled it on my notepads. I figured he wouldn't be able to tell me where you were buried, or that I'd get lost in the maze of granite headstones. He came from the back of his office with two papers in his hand. On them he marked the exact spot where you were. I asked him again about your name and the date. Was he sure? He only smiled and highlighted your marker in orange. He told me in a gentle voice where I would have to drive: past the pond with geese and ducks.

I drove past a pond just like he said. Four ducks waddled across the paved road. The sky was clear and blue, a smattering of clouds spread across. There was no wind, it was seventy-three degrees out, too nice to be in a cemetery. Around the curve. Past 'Book Circle,' past 'Temple Plot,' to the left of section thirty-six, in section thirty-five, around the bend from the veterans of war. I pulled the car away from a dead goose in the road and parked in the shade under a large maple tree. I kicked my shoes off in the car, left the windows down and the door unlocked, my belongings on the seat. I walked out on the lawn. Your marker was the second one I read.

You see in movies, or maybe you read about, people who fall on top of a grave marker, stricken with grief. I had expected that I would walk up dignified-like, that I would bend on my knees and bow my head. I had expected to be shocked, I had expected tears would come at some time during the visit, but that they might be forced since you had been gone so long. I had expected I would stay a few moments, say a silent prayer, and be on my way.

When you were alive you used to blow me away when you looked at me. When you died it was like pieces of me had burst apart, spilling on the floor. Over the years I have felt that at times, I have found parts of those pieces, damaged, but still mine. When I walked up to your grave that last

small piece of glass inside of me, the one I had held bound in muscle and flesh, the one I had protected because I had whispered to it in the black of night that you were coming back, that piece finally broke. I felt like a dish clattering, on the verge of falling, something that you watch in slow motion, thinking it can be caught at that last, final moment. For years I had tottered. My last piece finally fell.

I crumpled. My legs bent beneath me, my body stretched out on the lawn. My palms brushed the marble of your marker as if it were your face, and the grass overgrowing it your hair. I pushed at the green, forcing it away from the shiny black surface. My tears fell into the holes after the numbers of your birth, (January 13, 1967), and your death (November 28, 1989). I traced my finger over the letters in your name, over your middle initial, taking a minute to remember your full name, to say it in my head.

A small dried worm lay on your marker. I cleaned him off, cleared more grass. I plucked the petals of the rose I had brought, scattering its silky crimson petals over your glossy black tombstone. I explained about the flower. I had wanted to buy you a dozen roses, leave them with you, but this morning, as I had looked out my window, I had seen one last rose of summer on my bush. It seemed right, bringing you something from my home, something from where I lived now, something that I took care of. It seemed right pulling off the fleshy petals, touching them one by one and placing them over the engraved letters of your name. Better than sticking the flower in the corner of your grave to turn brown and die.

What do you tell someone who has been gone that long? You tell them how old you are. You

tell them about your dreams, what it is like to grieve for them every year. You tell them where you live, who you make love to, what you fill your days with. I told you about your mother, your brother, at least what I knew about them. I told you what kind of music you would probably like if you were alive, told you about my family, the people in my life. I told you what had hurt most in the last ten years. I told you I still wrote poetry, that you were still the motivating force behind most of it.

Now that I had found you I didn't want to leave. But the wind shifted and the sky darkened and two hours had passed. It was time to go. I told you so. I promised I would return, promised to myself that somehow, some way, you would know what I had said, that you would accept it and believe it.

I bent down and pressed my face against the cool granite of your gravemarker. I closed my eyes and pictured you beneath; an empty shell. I kissed the marker, believing you would receive my lips to your paper-thin skin, that I would heal any hurt that you might still have. I thanked you. It got in my car, avoided looking in the rear-view mirror and drove home.

I expected words like 'closure' and 'cathartic' would describe how I was feeling. It was only sadness. No word in my thesaurus came closer. Just 'sadness'. I was sad. I am still sad. I will always be sad. You are not here, at least not now, not with me.

I looked down at my hands as I drove. They were smeared in black; partly from my mascara and partly from the dirt around your grave. A mixing of us.

coming of age

SELECTION OF MERIT

Mary Guantz

- Rummaging in my closet -

the deepest, darkest part -

looking for pantyhose, or shoes,

or some other implement of work, or war,

– I found

My birthday suit.

I pulled it on,

danced to the mirror and looked.

A little wrinkled in the knees, sprung at the butt,

and I'm sure they were wearing

breasts higher that year.

Still, it fit - like skin.

Twisting around to see behind I saw

that dimple, that divot, that freckle,

that me.

Older, but thank God, no wiser,

I wore it to work that day

and bought a cake and candle

to celebrate my birthday suit.

coming of age

SELECTION OF MERIT

Mary Quantz

Rummaging in my closet -

the deepest, darkest part -

looking for pantyhose, or shoes,

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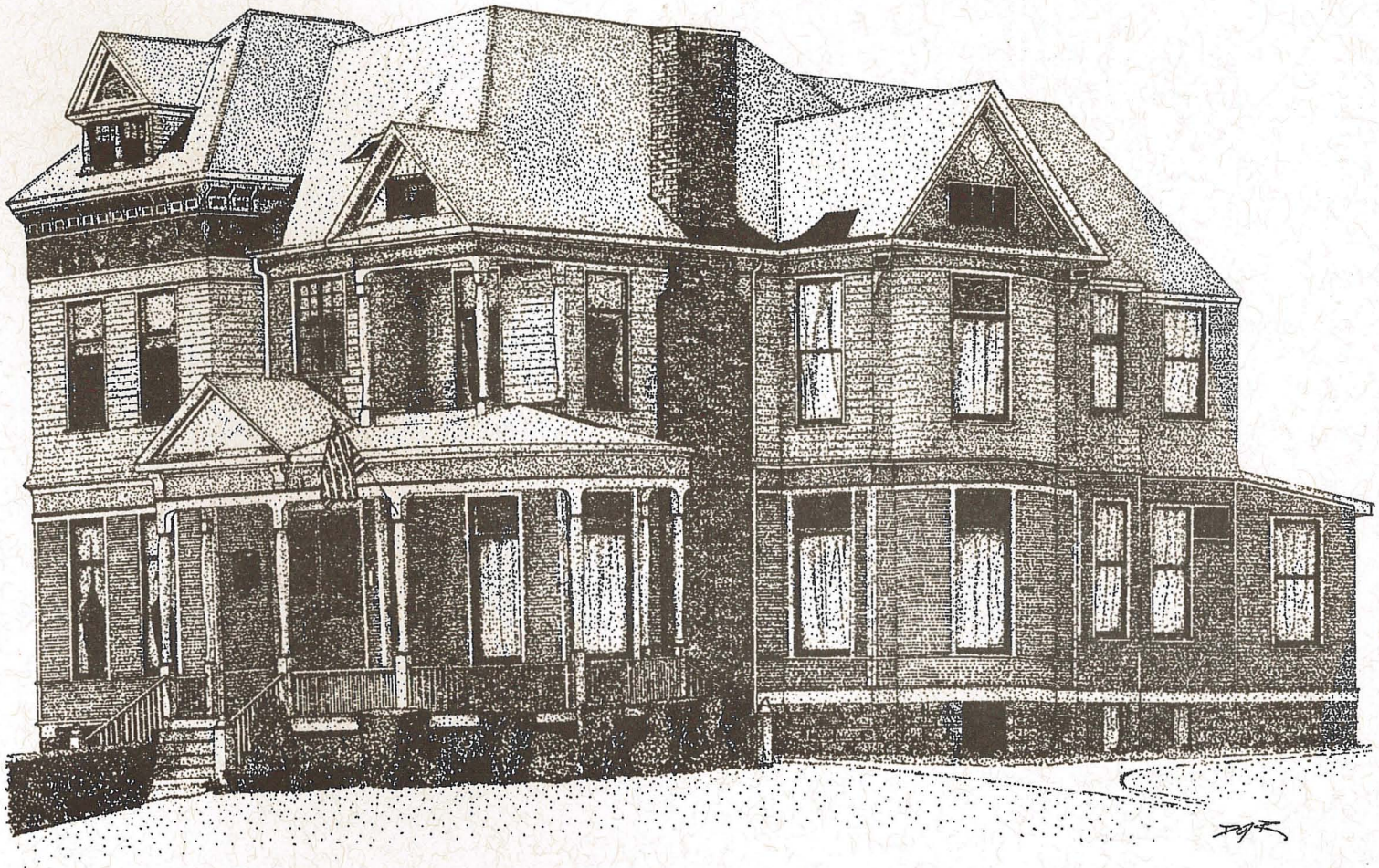
and bought a cake and candle

to celebrate my birthday suit.

victorian inn

SELECTION OF MERIT

Donnie J. Riehl



peace and quiet

SECOND PLACE ESSAY

Jason Preston

I get out of my red Mercury Cougar at a scenic lookout in Beards Hills and take a quick survey of the area. I see the cliff some twenty feet in front of me and the valley beyond it, and, even though I can't see it, I know Mill Creek speaks its peculiar tongue below. As I walk to the cliff's edge, I try to think about what this place is to me. This is where I can go to see something besides flat farmland or a crowded waterfront. This is where I can avoid the sounds of traffic constantly assaulting my ears. This is where I can forget about other people. This is where I can escape from civilization. Since that, of course, is an idealized view, it isn't always like that.

I walk to the cliff's edge to make another, more detailed survey of my surroundings. The cliff at my feet is a steep incline of eighty feet made of clay and rocks baked by the summer sun and nearly devoid of plant life. Summer rains have carved sharp gullies into its surface like the worn lines of an old man's face. A few hundred feet to my left is an electrical tower, an enormous steel monster, invading the natural surroundings with technology. At the base of the cliff lies Mill Creek, a full fledged river from my perspective, doing its best impression of a mountain stream out west with even salmon spawning on its rocky bed during their time. Beyond the river is a wide plain, overgrown with wildflowers, blueberries, and poison ivy. The distance across the plain seems immense, but that is probably an optical illusion, and, as I have no map, I must guess that what seems four miles is probably less than one. At the far edge of the valley is a hardwood forest with the occasional white pine to spice up the scenery when the leaves of the hardwoods quit work. I take my glasses off and the scene becomes a Monet: fuzzy greens and brown melting into each other. The illusion lasts until a UPS truck flies down the road behind me rudely snapping me back to reality.

I decide that there will be too many interruptions here, so close to the road, so I apply an unhealthy amount of bug repellant and head down a dirt trail to the river. The trail is nothing constructed; it is simply the result of generations of hunters and fishermen who have been parking their vehicles where mine currently is since before the parking lot was constructed. Unfortunately, it rained yesterday, and the trail is a soppy mess. Each step is a labor, and care must be taken as not to trip on exposed roots of the trees holding the cliff trail together. Still, the trail has a Zen quality to it: flowing down to the river gently, making its navigation seem natural.

Once the trail reaches the river, I stand silently on the banks of Mill Creek. I stand for minutes and hear only the water when I'm startled to see a red-tailed hawk, gliding over the water, looking for food, and ignoring my existence. Suddenly it dives to the river, is

rewarded with a small fish, and flies away to eat in privacy. I watch, trying to get my mind around what I'm seeing, when I hear someone coming down the trail, and making a racket, from the other way. Two fishermen come into view: they're betrayed by their fishing poles and hip waders. They cast their lines in a couple dozen feet away from me; I silently curse them for intruding, and decide it's time to move on.

I follow the trail farther along the river, passing the two fishermen who look puzzled to see someone without a pole or gun in a state game area. I imagine that when I'm out of view "hippie" or "idiot kid" will be used to described me by the two. Soon, I come to a dead tree lying helpless across the river, and use it as a bridge to go into the hinterland, a place where I will surely find some peace. I walk through the marshy land both along the river and towards the forest, listen to the drone of mosquitoes, and try to clear my mind. After walking for a half hour - I'm guessing as I refuse to carry a watch - I find a dry patch of land. I sit to eat a powerbar and drink some water when I hear - of all things - a car alarm; its sound carries too well in the valley. I weigh everything that's happened today and decide to leave before I forget how great seeing the hawk was and also, remember not to come here on a weekend again. I hope I can find my way back to that fallen tree.

the narrow gate

SELECTION OF MERIT

Brandon Lee Manuilow



for eponine

SELECTION OF MERIT

Heather Herrmann-Miller

Only with the blackness of night
can we ever truly see.

The splash of reflection on pavement
shows slivers of the truth,
the things only the night holds,
things we know but are afraid of.

The creaking springs on a bed,
the slip of a man's body over our own,
the heat of an image only a cool evening removes,
afterwards, when we are alone.
Streams of letters forming words and words
forming sentences and sentences spilling
into the hollow of the evening,
the round globe of silence that
our presence slips open, and allows in.

Catching and holding those paragraphs
in the drippings of the moon, in the
making believe of our own fantasies,
the sharpest truth we dare to believe,

so that it only becomes safe at dark,
when the city has gone to sleep,
and we live where we are at home,
inside our heads.

that can't-get-it-all-done, cramped-up feeling

SELECTION OF MERIT

Elaine Robb

Two years ago, I joined clubs in order to make friends, get out, avoid that dreaded Hermit Zone. You know that zone, the HZ. It's when you do things like flying kites by the light of the moon or you bake cookies for birds. These are not, in and of themselves, bad things, but when you start singing to the birds, in a language only you can understand, it is possible that a passerby might stop, and think, "Huh."

I was already a certified, got-my-hours-in (as in volunteer hours) Master Gardener, so actually attending the monthly meetings was a no-brainer. Just had to heave my body out the door and go. So two years ago, I did exactly that. I found myself in the untenable, undesirable, downright sad position of permitting my daughters to do the dinner dishes without me. Leaving them to scrub the wood table, dry it thoroughly, stretch Saran Wrap across the breadth of leftover casserole dishes, soaking the stiff and encrusted empties, was a loss. But I did what I had to do.

I got in my car and drove away.

Soon I found myself actually listening at the meetings, in addition to munching the muffins, sipping the tea and chatting with fellow gardeners about pesky, invasive plants such as Impatiens grandiflora and violets. I learned that vicious, squirmy slugs were responsible for those unsightly holes in my hosta leaves, but that crunched up eggshells would do away with the varmints. My older daughter defended the slugs, and started a *Save the Slugs* campaign.

I learned about gardening with arthritis, and got ideas for when I'm older: creating raised garden beds at waist level, so that I could garden while sitting down.

This is also good for young, flexible, but slightly lazy gardeners.

I learned that leather gloves are good when pruning roses. Good idea, I thought, after years of using ordinary cloth

gloves, and poking myself with thorns at regular intervals.

I learned that a lot of people volunteered at these meetings. I thought this would be a good thing for me to do, too. After all, I should contribute to the world around me. The world is a good place, filled with beautiful things like fragrant viburnums, floriferous dahlias and good-hearted people who help each other.

So, even though this was all very new to me, this concept of volunteering, I started to say yes.

I said yes to painting basement walls with Peter Rabbit and ponds and slightly giant, mutant geese. The unfortunate scale discrepancy was a mistake, but I figured that the fourth graders at Earthkeepers – an environmental, learn-by-doing field trip program at Goodells Park – probably would not notice.

I said yes to trudging around Earthkeepers, as a behind-the-scenes assistant, hauling wood benches and other props through fields and up hills, in rain so perfect that it successfully dribbled into, and down, the neck of my windbreaker.

And then the answer yes began to spiral, go wacky. It came out of my mouth before I even noticed.

Yes, I'll get the monthly speakers for Terra Nova, my other gardening club. Yes, I'll make multiple phone calls, talk to multiple answering machines, wait multiple days before phoning multiple more times.

Yes, I'll write the Master Gardener Newsletter. I'll drive to each of the eighteen gardens in St. Clair county, talk with each host gardener for two hours, fill pages of notebook paper with scribbles, and then wonder how I would ever distill it all down into clean copy in a week's time.

Then, there's the car pooling, the marathon laundry, the grocery shopping, the vegetable washing, the chicken cleaning, the kitty feeding; the vacuuming, the tile scrubbing, the dusting, the ironing.

Yes, I'll pay the bills and write lists of when to do what, so that I don't miss doing any of those things I should be doing.

Yes, I'll sit down this afternoon, and wonder, how did I get here? To this place where I feel tired and a bit worried about whether I can get any of this done.

I must stop.

I told this to my husband, earlier today.

"Just don't volunteer anymore," he said.

"Don't worry. I won't."

I returned home from tonight's Master Gardener meeting.

"I volunteered again."

He shook his head. "I knew it. Why do you do that?"

I sighed. "They needed someone. If I didn't volunteer, there wouldn't be a lecture series this year. No one else would do it."

"Why *did* you volunteer?" my friend, Penny, asked the same question the following day. "You were feeling overwhelmed as it was."

"Because it's for the lecture series," I told her. "And I like the lecture series. And it's not that much work, really. Heck, it's only three speakers and I got twelve last year for Terra Nova. Plus, it's fun. There's a much bigger turnout. It's in a nice auditorium instead of in a museum basement. And there's an expense account. So I can actually pay for good speakers, instead of trying to entice them to come, with inducements of selling plants or mugs with petunias on them. Also, I can take them out to dinner with some other Master Gardeners. That would be fun. And it will be fun to introduce them."

I paused. "But that's not really all of it."

I thought a moment, letting the vague, swirling mass of feelings gel into verbal form.

"It's like I'm on a roller coaster. Someone asks, 'Who will volunteer?' and my arm just goes up. It's like I'm on remote control."

"More like out of control," said my friend.

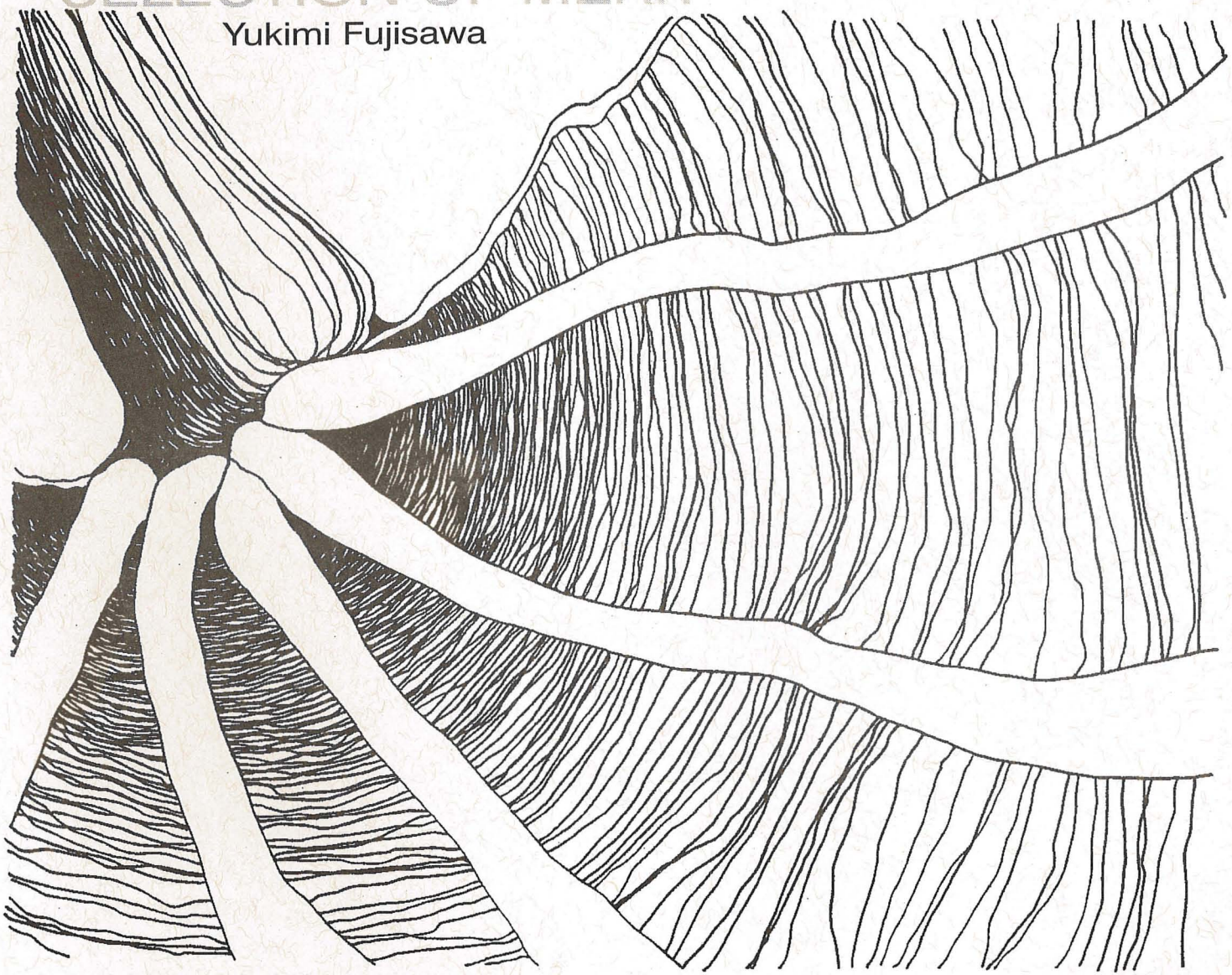
Leave it to Penny to nail it on the head.

"Huh," I said. "You're right."

maple leaf 5

SELECTION OF MERIT

Yukimi Fujisawa



just when

REDMAN AWARD

Heather Herrmann-Miller

She got the cactus for one dollar.
I knew this because I had seen it,
on clearance at the hardware shop,
the day before.

"I think it's cool," she said and I
agreed, sucking my picked finger silently
while I climbed into her car and we
drove over a slick, black, lake to
an out of town bar to get drunk together.

She only told me she loved me when she was drunk,
and I bought her bad black coffee after, at the
twenty-four hour donut place, on the way home.
Her lipstick smeared off the line of perfect purple lips,
eyeliner smeared also, a black pool beneath black eyes;
but I watered the cactus every day.

I wasn't exactly sure what it or she needed,
not since we were twelve and singing into
stolen wooden spoons.
Now the Karaoke bar seems so much scarier,
using my real voice and all,
echoing throughout a thick-smoke room,
no one listening, not really,

voice loud against the slurred clatter of bottles
and her screaming, "You're great - I love you,"
across the room, the only sound I remember
days later, after I knocked the cactus
off my shelf,
and spilled black dirt onto my
gleaming kitchen floor.

second serving

SELECTION OF MERIT

Heather Herrmann-Miller

The old blind woman served them a meal of saltine crackers and tuna fish. Casie grimaced; it didn't matter, the old woman couldn't see it, but Casie couldn't help but glance up at the woman's watering blue eyes rimmed in red and wonder if she caught her. Her parents said the woman was her grandmother, no, her great-grandmother, and that Casie should ask her sometime what her life was like. Casie didn't think she wanted to know. The old woman's house was bare, her furniture looked uncomfortable and proper, and her big black phone had large white numbers on it, numbers that looked all wrong because of their size. Casie sat outside on the sagging porch and ran her eyes along the cracks in the sidewalk while she waited for her parents to finish their visit.

Cassia's great-grandmother died eight years later, when Casie was fifteen. The old woman slumped in a wheelchair when Casie visited her last, and Casie tried to understand the garble that issued forth from the woman's thin, pink lips, but instead of asking her "what" over and again, she simply traced the blue veins that mapped their way across her grandmother's paper-thin hand with her index finger. Casie put her grandmother's hand under her own and was surprised at how small it was. She wondered how much those hands had seen, how much she had missed out on because she was a child. She splayed her palm against her grandmother's and noticed that their fingers lined up perfectly; the tiny, round pads of their fingertips were exact. For a moment Casie thought that her grandmother said "perfect," but she couldn't be sure.

Casie wondered if her grandmother had watched her get married. Maybe God allowed her to look in on such an event from heaven, watch Casie from behind veiled eyes accept the rough hand of the boy that she would refer to as her husband from then on. Casie wondered what else it was that her grandmother

watched, and quickly pushed the thought from her mind. At dinner that evening the guests dined on roasted chicken and broiled white-fish but Casie only pushed the breading into her mashed potatoes. She drank deeply from her wine glass, blood-red Merlot spreading its legs against the crystal, a thick clear residue coating the inside of the glass, held in a ringed hand, above her heart.

Casie and her husband sat on their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary, alone. He had taken her to a restaurant on the lake, a place that specialized in seafood. When Casie entered the establishment and saw the slimy brown lobsters clinking their claws on the discolored glass tank, her stomach had turned. A Crayola-red one sat smiling on her husband's plate. With a twist of his left wrist he snapped a piece of shell off of the animal, revealing its steaming white insides. He dunked a flaky chunk in a container of drawn yellow butter. Casie stuck her fork into the pink flesh of her grilled tuna and turned, breaking off a one-inch section. The waiter stopped by their table to ask if everything was okay. Casie looked up at him. "I need some crackers," she said. He looked at her oddly. She hadn't wanted any with her chowder. She set down her fork. "Make sure they're saltines." The waiter grimaced as he walked away, and Casie did see him, her eyes rimmed in red.

images
SELECTION OF MERIT
Heather Herrmann-Miller

They have come to this:
gray bits of photocopied papers, that when
put under glass, closely resemble the original.

My fingers are split and dry;
slivers of framing glass slicing me open,
the knife I use to rub off sticker-prices
slipping along me as well,
the miss of the hammer from the nail,
and onto my finger.

I am trying to learn about people who never knew me.
The image of a black and white smile.

These ones who perhaps thought of nothing at all -
least of all a great, great, sometimes great-granddaughter,
pressing their reflection
between two pieces of glass -
as bodies tumble onto beds,
and hands run along skin,
and eyes are closed and opened
and closed again.

I study the photo of my brothers and I, centered.
I cover our facial features, determining
exactly where it is we are alike, but it is not
what I see, rather, the life we have shared.

My grandfather's picture is next to ours -
in it, he is skinny and holding his son, my father,
in the air above his head.

To the left my mother and I,
faces pressed closely,
before I went away.
And my father and I dancing,
the first time I was held by the man
tossed into the air by his father - captured on film.

My great, great, sometimes great-grandchildren
will press copies of
my father and I between glass, and
while sticking split and bleeding fingers
into mouths shaped like ours,
put us on their walls.

Trying to learn about family they do not remember.
Images, full-color.

I wonder,
when they walk by,
how often they will glance our way,
through shiny glass and polished wood, and
run a finger along our well-worn edges.

as seen on house of style

SECOND PLACE SHORT STORY

Bonnie Sue Kalmar

I used to hate being so tall. It's hard to be an eighth grade girl and be six-one, but I learned to deal with it. Everyone used to think that I should play basketball, but I was like, no way, I'm totally going to model. The boys won't call me names like giraffe then – they'll all want to go out with me and I'll be like, as if. I don't personally know any models, but I watch MTV House of Style like all the time and I read all of the interviews my favorite models do in the fashion magazines. I like Shalom Harlow and Kate Moss the best – they're so skinny and pretty. I admire them because I know that being a model must be really hard work – you have to be like so disciplined. I'm practicing to be a model already because I don't want it to be like a huge lifestyle change.

I really have to watch what I eat now. I love to drink water because it like totally fills me up. If I need a snack, I usually pour some mustard on a spoon and eat that, because mustard has like no calories. Sometimes my mom makes me eat stuff for dinner, but I learned how to hide it in my napkin and sneak it to the dog. What's really cool is that she gives me money for lunch at school and I just don't eat and then I have spending money for make-up and clothes and stuff. And if I really need to splurge, I eat chocolate ice cream. It's really easy to throw up because it's so creamy and it tastes good going down and coming up. I started smoking too, because it like lessens my appetite and ups my metabolism. Naomi Campbell smokes and she's so successful. It's hard to get smokes sometimes, but I deal.

What else is really cool is that I don't get my period anymore. I used to have to spend a week in a bloated, cramped, bleeding hell, but that's like stopped and I love it. It's cool too because I can use the pool to exercise everyday if I want. I usually do it three times a week though. Ever since I started watching my weight, I've been really sleepy but that's just because I have to exercise so much. I run for three miles on the treadmill everyday and then I do the Stairmaster, the exercise bike, and my step class, but that only meets twice a week. I do yoga five days a week too, because Cindy Crawford totally swore by it. Can you believe she's like a size four now? I can't believe she let herself get so fat. I weigh myself a lot, so I know when I'm gaining an ounce of weight. I weigh myself before I shower, after I shower, at lunchtime, dinnertime, and before I go to bed. I still need to lose like fifteen more pounds – I'd like to be an even one hundred pounds. I know that's a little underweight for my height, but most models are forty-eight percent thinner than the average woman or something.

I know my mom is a little worried about me, but it's cool because when I start bringing in the big paychecks, she'll be so happy that I did all this work. And then everyone will think I'm beautiful then won't they?



telluric silence

BOURKE AWARD

Lindsay Hayosh

muse

SELECTION OF MERIT

Elaine Robb

Crisp, white paper, full with texture and grit:
it meets my clean quill
and shudders with delight.

There is joy in the meeting:
like friends long separate
but aching to talk.

I yearn for this celebration:
when fireworks sputter snowflakes of blue and orange
into the night sky;
when close friends of Ponder and Wonder
stroll in quiet contemplation;
when plot meets character
and characters chat with you
by the fireplace,
over hot wine, sparkling.

Each of us, alone, meets ideas:
first stranger, then acquaintance.
We dance carefully, almost touching –

I cling to my old friends.
But I want the new and seek the drastic drama of the unknown.
He comes in a cape
swathed in black and purple.
I take his hand.
Together: we fly.

Wait. Is there a character more real
than man in black and purple cape?
What does he eat for breakfast? How does he irritate
his closest friends?
Do they overlook it; and why?

Then, we can fly.

politics, war and third grade

SELECTION OF MERIT

Sarah Kautzman

"Mom, GI Joe was on the bus today," my little brother, Scott, happily told my mother upon returning home from school in Heidelberg. As my mother laughed along with Scott's dramatic and rather embellished tale of the MP (or military police) officer who had accompanied our bus home from the base, I came to the realization that the United States was not the untouchable nation I had been brought up believing it was.

I should have known something was different the night before. Every two hours from eleven p.m. until five a.m., my father and other officers living in our neighborhood that was located off base, went out and checked under cars for explosives. But being only in the third grade, I was more concerned with other things, like New Kids on the Block and sleeping. If the nightly bomb check had not been an indication that something was not right, the armed pairs of MP's who patrolled our backyard should have been. As I sat eating Cheerios, I watched through our patio doors as the two men in fatigues held their rifles in both hands as they patrolled the highly military populated area of the civilian German neighborhood of Nussloch.

Things at home were not the only things that changed when the United States became involved in the Gulf War. Upon arriving at school, Mrs. Nakama, my teacher, informed us that morning recess would be held in the gym. Upon returning from the gym, we stared in awe at the armed guards that lined the back fence of our school's playground. In the afternoon, we had outdoor recess for fifteen minutes while the guards and their

reinforcements monitored the German Autobahn (the European super highway) directly behind our school's fence. The biggest thrill of the day had been seeing the large Army choppers fly overhead as we played. Though I did not know it at the time, the helicopters were transporting troops off to fight in Operation Desert Storm. Before we left school that day, the loudspeaker came on and we were read letters from General Norman Schwartzkopf and Colin Powell about where and what our mothers and fathers were fighting for. Instead of inspiring our patriotism, the announcements did nothing but fuel the fear. As we boarded our charter buses, we were greeted by our bus driver, ours was Ed, and our very own armed escort, Sergeant Eric. Imagine being in third grade and having an MP on your school bus. It is easy to see why we began to think that Saddam Hussein was sending over terrorists specifically to hijack a bus full of Patrick Henry Elementary students.

That night, my dad had a special meeting, so mom took my two brothers and me to the base for dinner. As we reached the gates, I saw a giant "B" positioned next to the guard station. Mom stopped the car, showed her military ID and told the officers our purpose for going on base. Through out the next few months, I would learn the four Army security levels. Not so much from the names, but more by what happened with each letter's posting. If "A" was posted, we were at Alpha level. At "A", you stopped if your car did not have Army stickers in the windshield and told the MPs why you were there. If you had the stickers, like we did, you just drove through. A "B" signified Bravo level, and whether you had the stickers or not, you stopped and answered the officers' questions. I quickly learned to dread "C" levels or Charlie levels. The entrance would be backed up forever at Charlie. The cars would stop, show their ID's, there was no admittance without the ID. Two soldiers with long handle mirrors stuck them under your car, checking for explosives. Every fifth car was pulled over and checked. I hated being the fifth car; I always thought the MPs

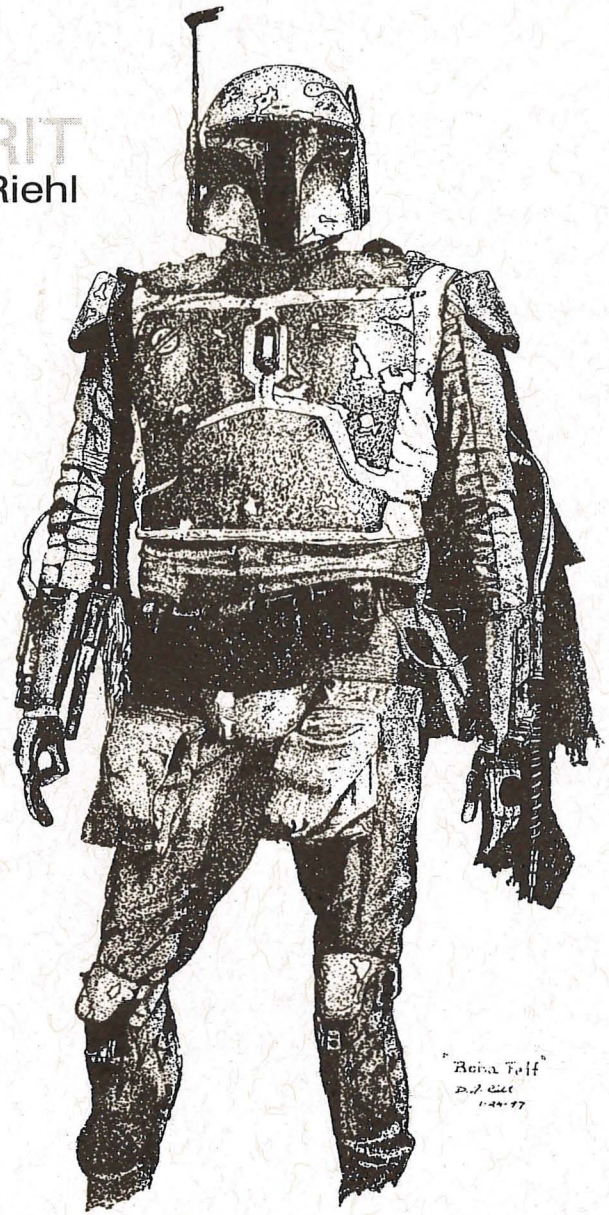
would arrest me for the drink I had spilled on the gray interior of our car. While we only reached Delta, or "D" level a few times, it was the one I remember most clearly. There was limited access, even with a pass. The mirrors were used and every car was pulled over and checked. Then they brought out the dogs that checked for explosives or explosive residue. The first time we were stopped at "D" I stood outside and cried. The officer next to me was Eric, our bus's "GI Joe". He was nice everyday on the bus, but when he crouched next to me, his face showed no hint of a smile. He tried to comfort me, but I kicked him and threw a tantrum, telling him, and anyone in earshot, that he knew we were Americans and that he rode my bus and knew we did not have bombs. Of course they continued to check the car, but for those few month after that, I learned lots of things about the world that altered my life forever.

I learned that the United States is not the only nation with weapons. I learned that the U.S. was as vulnerable and open to attack as much as any other nation. Most disturbing to me then was I learned that the world was not the safe, sheltered place that a military life had always led me to believe it was. Something of that great a magnitude is very scary for a young child, and it changed the way I look at the world forever. And, it all started with a GI Joe on our bus.

boba fett

SELECTION OF MERIT

Donnie J. Riehl



immortal beloved

SELECTION OF MERIT

Amy Griffor

You are the only bird I've known with so many wings.
A winter's glass fire - Pluto Blue.
Giving me more of myself, to peel back my fried layers to give birth to all my colors.
and
Your ability to love, a never questioning certainty -
Same truth as the wrinkles in my brown leather coat and more
solid than the walls of every room ever seen- just-holding-its-self-together.
Hands that itch for the dirt of Spring, to taste your beginnings
and absorb this sticky love down every pore.
And then I can bring you in -
with all your black-white hair
child
animal
god
fish
Hands on my back - Only You
Brown, bear child, perhaps it is you I desire.

the whole time

FIRST PLACE SHORT STORY

Heather Herrmann-Miller

She was thinking that maybe it was the coffee that did it. Gave her the jitters so that here she was, two-thirty in the morning, cleaning the bathtub. He was sleeping soundly. She kissed his cheek softly as she padded out of the bedroom and down the hallway, making sure the door to the bedroom was closed so he wasn't disturbed.

It was the cleaning that always got her in trouble. Things just couldn't be simple - wasn't that what he was always after her about? So that when she started to clean the bedroom it was impossible to ignore the stray objects poking their way out from under the bed; she had to get down on her hands and knees and see what had snuck away. And she couldn't just put her jewelry back into the stand-up jewelry box he had gotten her for their anniversary. She had to clean the entire thing out and organize by color, season, and style.

She didn't know why she had kept the bracelet. A long time had passed since she had gotten it, yet when she closed her eyes and slowed her breathing it seemed as if time had not moved along at all. Her ex had bent down on one knee and slipped the thin gold chain around her wrist. The tiny gold heart charm dangled softly against her skin, hitting her bone. Part of her felt guilty for keeping it, being that she was married and all now. But she hadn't gotten rid of it, just shoved it into the back of the box, covered the chain with some pink dangle earrings, a safe thing indeed since she hated both the color pink and earrings that dangled.

It was the little things about her ex that had originally fueled her feelings. Like the way he ran ahead of her in order to open any door she might pass through. Or how he tried to pull out her chair for her as she looked at him puzzled, not used to having that done. One time he made a tape for her, told her it was his song to her. Bob Seegar's "Accompany Me." Hearing the words now made her want to take her hands and cover her ears. She hadn't accompanied him in a very long time. She wondered what he thought about, if anything, when the song played now on the radio.

She figured it was as good a time as any to take a break from scrubbing the tub. She needed something to drink. Opening the refrigerator and moving around the bottled water, orange juice, and milk she

saw a mustard colored stain on the back of the refrigerator wall. Shuffling things around further she saw that the sweet and sour sauce that she had warned her husband not to bring home from McDonald's because it would never get used anyway, had burst open. Of course. And she was sure that she was the only one who ever opened the refrigerator, the only one who ever saw natural food disasters, the only one with strong enough arms to scrub dried brown crud from a cold plastic wall. She slammed the door closed, ignoring the stain, reached into her pocket, and pulled the bracelet out.

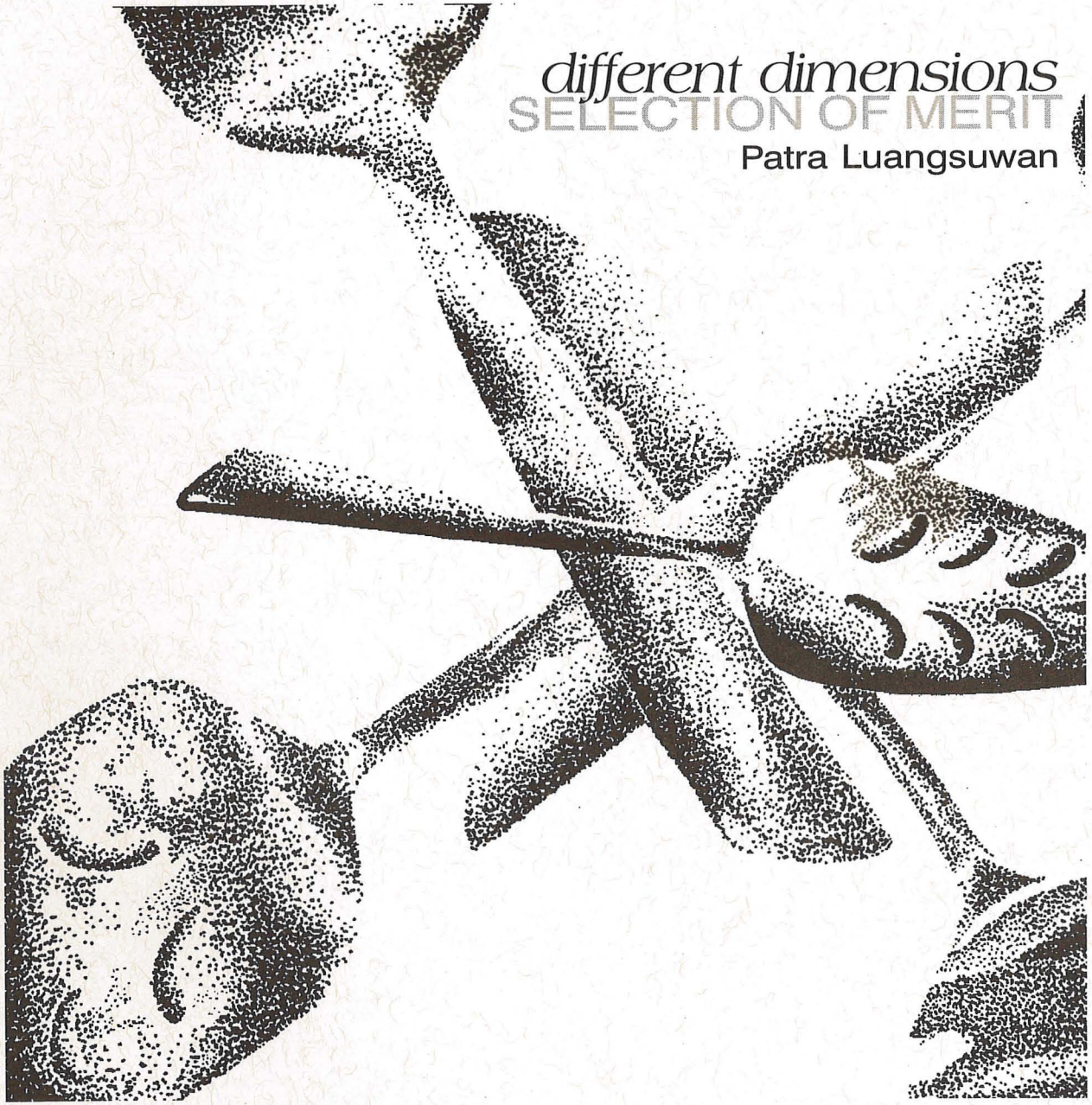
Immediately she saw the eyes of the man who had given it to her. They took everything in like a sponge soaking up life, bled everything out that he ever felt. It was easy to forget the eyes, since she had never seen any that came close to mirroring his. Pictures never did them justice, they were foggy and blurry, and even the best prints turned his own red. It was only when she woke from dreaming that she found herself out of breath and warm under the blankets. Only then that she remembered what it was like to be the target of his gaze.

His smell too, was never paralleled. At first, she would hold up his letters and breath them in. Spice and skin and the kind of shampoo he used seemed to be infused on each page. Time, however, dispelled the molecules, and she had to take deeper and greater breaths to even sense that he at one time had held the papers. On occasion, in the grocery store or mall, she would be wandering around, thumbing through the clearance rack, and she would smell him. Or something close to him. But as quickly as it came it went.

She returned to the tub. Bending down on cold gray tile, her legs bare since she slept in an old pair of her husband's boxer shorts, she started in. It seemed no matter how much effort she put into scrubbing, the only results she got showed up on her skin as it reddened in reaction to the chemicals. The tub was old, porcelain finish worn off, stains of dirt and grime soaking in, resulting in a dulled surface.

Still, cleaning made her feel as if she were accomplishing something. But until this morning, she hadn't bothered cleaning the tub as usual. Just a quick wipe with a damp cloth and onto what she could get gleaming: sink, toilet, and floor. The shower curtain was kept closed anyway, and if people wanted to be nosy and push it aside, well, let them. What would they way? Hey, I peeked behind your shower curtain and man the mold in there is out of control. She thought not.

She had a system for this. Side to side, up and down, semi-circles. The rinse and respray and rescrub. Close your eyes, lean into the motion, and breath as deeply as you can. Lysol and bleach stinging your nose, scalding your throat, making your eyes water. All the while your golden heart makes tiny scraping noises in the belly of the tub.



different dimensions
SELECTION OF MERIT
Patra Luangsuwan

the walk

FIRST PLACE POETRY

Heather Herrmann-Miller

It was hot that summer, and in the evening,
the blanket of navy darkness did little to cool us.
We walked, our laughter hitting the silences of the houses.
My legs were bare and brown and I wore no socks with my shoes,
and you frowned, disappointed in my choice of footwear again.

Families sat eating at oak dinner tables, behind cool-tempered glass.
In-ground sprinkler systems dampening deep green lawns,
wetting us, our cotton clothing clinging as we came to the beach
and the earth opened up,
the silver of the lake reflecting the silver in the stars.

We waded in, knee deep, sharp slimy stones
cutting into the flesh of our feet,
pebbles streaming up between our toes.
The water you splashed at me beaded on my arm,
slowly dripped off my skin, onto yours.
The moist heat that played along our flesh all evening
now entered our bodies
and we wrestled, wordless, setting it free.

After, we brushed sand from our damp places, walked back,
noticing now that in most of the houses along the shore
the lights had been turned off,
and from my fingers, I dangled the shoes I had worn.

the hunt

SELECTION OF MERIT

Margaret Kearns

The dark cold morning
is blanketed in frost;
thick, smooth and sparkling.
I forget how frozen I feel
when I see the clear, black, beautiful sky
with the little dipper
pouring out a new day for me.
Dawn breaks.
We begin our trek as
one magnificent scene
folds into another.
The sun rises,
warming the earth and me.
Its brilliance
shines through the trees;
maples in a fiery glow,
birch, ash, poplar in golden array,
oaks in their bronze metal splendor.
An uncanny rustle their leaves emit
when the soft gentle wind loosens them.
My ears are in tune to a melody
of tender falling rain
and yet
everywhere there's a radiance of light.
Tall grasses sway joined by
once lush green ferns
with great arms outstretched;

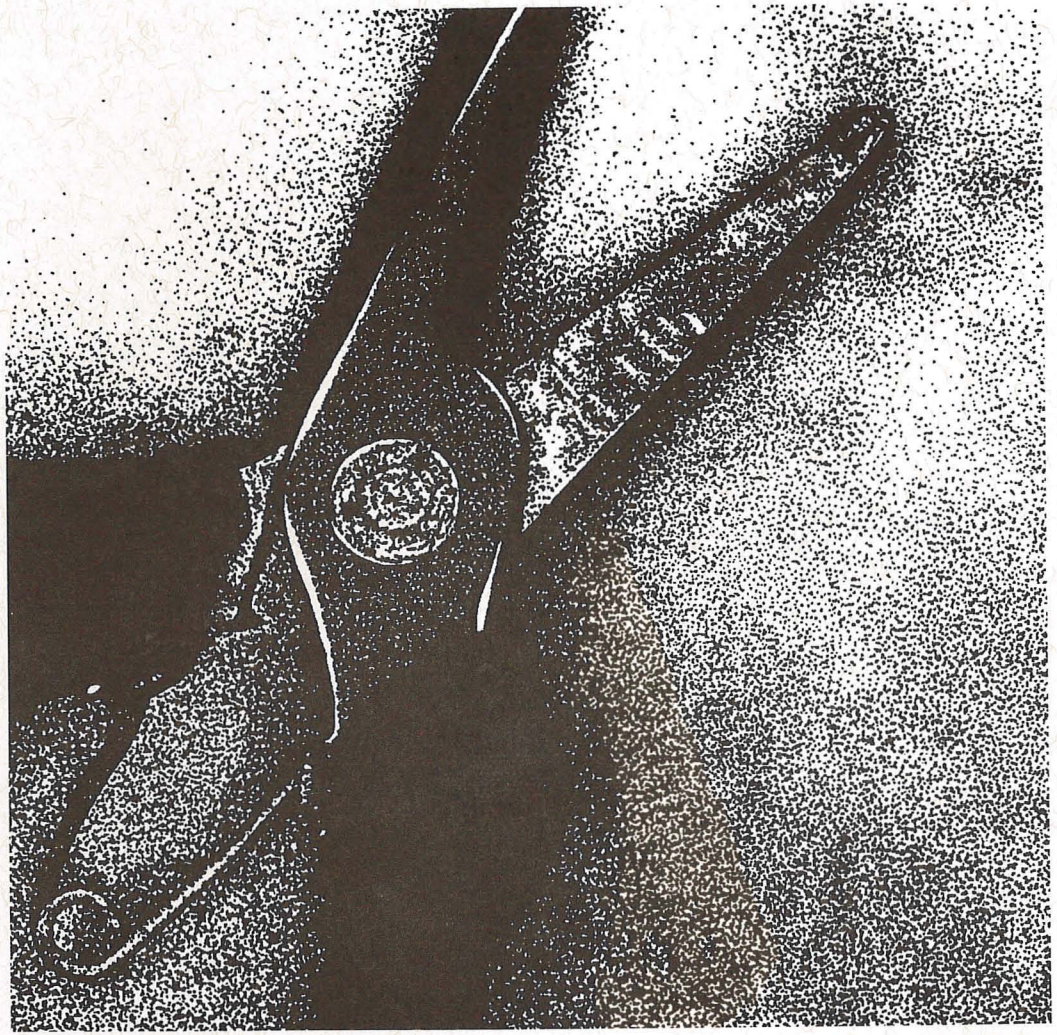
now shriveled brown
mocking little old gents,
leaning on canes,
top hats in hand.
Milkweed dried, cattails popped,
choke cherries stripped;
drained of life's fluid.
We rest.
Cobwebs glisten,
draping everywhere
capturing me
as we sit
on our royal log.
The breeze heightens sending
fluffy thistle seeds
up, down and all around
before planting them for
next year's beauties.
It whooshes, kissing me
with chilling lips
and then
diminishes to nothingness.
Sparrows twitter, ravens caw,
hairy's scan tree branches
while,
gray jays glide from pine to pine,
and partridge hide.
A dragonfly circles me,
lands smoothly upon my knee
then ascends in a helicopter maneuver.
Squirrels chatter leaving
no room for response.
It is time to move on.

Leaves crunch methodically
as our tromping resumes;
sometimes on trails
sometimes not,
permitting me to absorb
the peacefulness of the woods.
The decayed moss - embellished
logs crumble beneath my feet,
sinking, sinking.
My toes yearn to escape their boots
with hopes of curling
around the lustrous green moss.
Black bear roam free marking their path;
invisible, though they remain.
A deer skims through the trees
just before dusk daring me to catch a glimpse.
I aim and shoot,
the flash ignites.
He stands off hidden, his blowing we hear.
The moon rises, dark sets in;
an owl hoots,
coyotes howl,
We sleep.

choppers

SECOND PLACE

Danielle Hunt



distance and desire

SELECTION OF MERIT

Mary Quantz

She cries for the moon.
Arms raised as if to pull it down and light the night
and dim the day.
Her world, thin shadows cast in green half-light.

She cries for the moon, believing it holds the answers.
Sun-fevered or dark-night chilled, she moves between the two.
And hides from penance or from promise.

She cries for the moon and the strangely lit dreams it allows.
The sun blasts dreams to flaming pieces.
The darkness swallows them whole.

In stillness she searches the sky and waits
for shattered darkness and spilling silver.
The pulse in her throat, a jagged rhythm,
backlit, a negative image,
she begins to dance.

Dancing for the moon.
Fluid invitation, bathed in light,
She begs the moon to join her.

She has heard the moon when it cries.
From its endless orbit above her.
She calls to the moon and knows that it hears,
and dreams of falling to earth.

The moonlight has weight as it traces her skin.
Heavy silk, she gathers it close,
closes her eyes, and tips back her head,
as light touches fire to her lips.

With a tug, night calls back the light.
Light, liquid fire burning, runs through her fingers.

Fading scent of moon on her skin,
her mouth, a taste where light has lingered.
She raises her arm in consent, farewell.
And turning, moves into the night.

lois the barbarian

SELECTION OF MERIT

Linda Rowe

The rustlings in the meadow grass kept getting louder. I was almost asleep when I began to hear what sounded like a large animal, a deer probably, coming slowly up the hill toward our camp site. Then I heard whisperings and knew that someone, not something, was out there.

"Lois," I hissed. "Hear that?"

"Yea," came a muffled reply from deep inside the sleeping bag next to me. "I'll bet it's those damn delinquent boys."

Lois and I and two other counselors were in charge of twenty-five Girl Scouts. We had hiked about a mile from the main camp that morning and had set up a primitive camp site for an overnight, so the kids could get some experience for the three-day hike the next week. All afternoon our unit had worked pitching tents, digging a fire pit and john hole, and lashing a kitchen area.

The kids had fixed a pretty good dinner of campers' stew, slightly burnt french bread and kool-aid. After a campfire we were all tired and the kids were asleep by 10:00 or so. The only light was from the kerosene lanterns we kept burning by the counselors' tents and the john. And now I lay in my warm sleeping bag and envisioned being invaded by a group of delinquents who were supposed to be kept out of everyone's way in a neighboring camp.

"Lois," I hissed again. "Don't you dare go to sleep. We've got to do something. We can't let those boys get into our camp."

"It would scare the holy crap out of the girls for sure," Lois almost chuckled.

Lois and I had been friends since junior high school. Though she was a year ahead of me, we were buddies every summer at camp. And now we were counselors together there.

She was a big girl - built kind of square and tall. She was not really fat - just big and very strong. She also had a genius IQ and played the violin well enough to be in the Pittsburgh Youth Orchestra.

My parents didn't like Lois. They felt she was a bad influence on me. And she was, but she was also a good friend and we had a lot of fun together.

Her father had died when she was young and her mother, almost old enough to be her grandmother, didn't pay much attention to what her very capable daughter did. Lois had her own car, smoked and knew every swear word there was. She took me through the red light district of Pittsburgh and several times we amused ourselves running up and down escalators in the Pittsburgh airport at midnight.

The whispering and rustling were getting louder.

"I'm sending the other counselors back to camp to get help," I whispered to the large hump in the neighboring sleeping bag.

I crawled out of our tent and crept over to the lantern-lit tent in the distance. After a whispered conference, the other two counselors took off for camp.

Back at my tent I was surprised to find Lois standing up mumbling about wanting a good night's sleep. She huffed over to our lantern, grabbed it and tramped toward the wood pile, where she grabbed an ax with her other hand. Then she started down the hill toward where the boys were hiding. I heard an unmistakable growl as she picked up speed and raised both her arms. Faster and faster she lumbered and within seconds I saw dark forms scrambling up from the high grass and stumbling into each other in their haste to get away. Lois's lantern cast ghostly irregular shadows over the entire confusion and I could hear curses and whinings from the boys as they tore off toward their camp.

Soon Lois, clutching the lantern and ax, came puffing back up the hill. Our kids never knew what had happened, it was over so fast and so quietly.

I guess the other counselors got back about a half hour later with the director and handyman. And I guess they stayed up until dawn by the campfire. At least, that's what I was told. I was asleep.

loving picasso

SELECTION OF MERIT

Heather Herrmann-Miller

Eleven years ago,
I saw for the first time,
exactly how a coffin looked on a man.

The silk white bedding paled the usual
flush of your skin, and yet there you lay,
destroyer of self, leaving me with only heavy
air:

the funeral home and flowers,
the removed jacket off an over-heated person,
a blanket of thickness that does not fit with
snow-frosted breath I gulp inside.

The ice hits the pane of the window in the
room where I lay, eleven years later.
Now when I remember your voice
it comes in phrases not of,
"I love you," but in things like,
"I have to get an oil change," or
"I like the color red."

I pretend when I hear those things you
refer to my body, or my lips, but
with you I am unsure.

I checked my mailbox today,
eleven years of waiting for a better explanation
than the one I have told myself:
that you needed to leave this coldness,

the white of snow, capped on your shoulders,
bringing back all the things you never told me.

Jewels don't tarnish easily
like polish-pushers would have you believe.
It would be simpler that way:
gold would fade, and I'd forget it had.
Instead, heads are only turned with a
flash of light, a blinding shine, scuff marks
buffed and forgotten.

I keep the gold you have given me,
eleven years later.
I have never cleaned it since you
slipped it onto my wrist and said,
"I ripped my jeans," or was it,
"I got a sliver in my finger"?

I like the wears in me,
things you can't polish away.
They make me feel real, existing,
eleven years later and you are not
rubbed off completely.
I am no longer smooth,
finished, a flicker of light to be admired by many;

only a simple thing,
deeply matted and passed over by most,
save for the one or two that run hands along me,
eleven years later, who
watch the snow cap my shoulders and open palms
and nod, knowing they will remember me,
years later, when I say things now like,
"I love Picasso," or,
"Let's go get some coffee."

deeply matted girl

Heather Herrmann-Miller

deeply matted girl
SELECTION OF MERIT

Heather Herrmann-Miller

Every night I walk by,
watching the soft underbelly of the lake
kaleidoscope and glow.
It is not afraid of change,
of you and I watching the
marmalade sky lace alongside it.

The trees spread thickly against the evening.
The earth is dark and rich.
People stand in the distance,
black silhouettes.
I wonder what they say, if it matters.

I reach up into the sky,
dipping fingertips into its jelly,
and smear it on sun-toasted skin.
Your tongue slides around my sweet spots,
looking for the small bits I will release
and you will brush away with a
stream of breath across my hand.

But those people are there,
voices skidding across a silent silver lake,
patterned moonlight thrown across,
myself shadowed in the crumbs of skin
piled at your feet:

a deeply matted girl.



Skull

SELECTION OF MERIT

Melissa Belli

grandpop's christmas card

SELECTION OF MERIT

Barbara Treadaway

My two older boys were at school and I had just put my two toddler sons down for an afternoon nap, when I noticed the mail lady pull up to the mailbox. It was a cold December day, so I put on my coat and headed for the mailbox to see who had sent Christmas cards that day. As usual, the mailbox was full. In the center of some junk mail were the cards I was eagerly awaiting. As I walked back to the house I leafed through them, but suddenly stopped dead in the middle of the driveway.

My eyes fell upon an envelope addressed to me. In the upper left hand corner was the name Anthony Skubish, Philadelphia, PA. My whole body seemed to shake, not from the cold, but from the shock of receiving a card from my grandfather. My feet finally started to move as I walked back into my house. I stood at the kitchen counter, staring at the envelope, not able to open it. There were tears flowing from my eyes; I could feel my heart pounding in my chest. When I was finally able to slice open the envelope, I took out the card and read the signature, Your Grandpop Anthony. That humble Christmas card led me on a journey of personal discovery, and also opened the door to some very wonderful relationships with my new found family.

On May 19, 1957, I was born to Estelle Skubish in Philadelphia, PA. Unlike most women giving birth to a little girl, Estelle was not a happy woman. There was no husband there to share her joy or hold her hand during labor. She was an unmarried woman, and had decided to give up her child for adoption. As soon as I was born, I was whisked away by the attending nurse. My mother was not told if she had given birth to a boy or a girl. On Estelle's twenty-first birthday, and

my third day of life, my new mom and dad took me home to begin a new life. Because it was Estelle's birthday, the lawyer handling my adoption felt sorry for her and told her that she had given birth to a little girl.

My adoptive parents never kept my adoption secret from me. They went out of their way to make me feel very special. They always told me that I was hand picked by them. When I reached my eighteenth birthday, they gave me my adoption papers, complete with Estelle's name and the name of the lawyer who handled my adoption. I was always curious to find her, but never had a real passion to do so until my dad died when I was twenty-seven. Months after he died, I took out my papers and wrote to the lawyer. A letter returned, explaining the lawyer had retired and the agency no longer had records of my adoption. Feeling disappointed, and afraid I had hit a dead end, I gave up my search.

Soon after, while watching an afternoon talk show, I heard of the Philadelphia Adoption Forum. I wrote to them and was soon contacted by a woman who was able to do some searching for me at city hall. She wrote back to me and enclosed the names and address of my grandparents, my mother's marriage license, and my original birth certificate. For five years I wrote to my grandmother, not knowing she had died on the day my second son was born. Estelle lived with my grandparents, along with my two sisters, after the death of her husband, and had been receiving the letters, but never contacted me. Well, on December 18, 1987, she went Christmas shopping, leaving my grandfather home alone. That day he intercepted my letter. And that very same day he sent me a Christmas card.

Not only did Grandpop send me the Christmas card, but a very long letter explaining the circumstances of my adoption and telling me a little about Estelle. He enclosed photos of himself, standing in front of his row house and garden in Philadelphia. He was such a dapper looking gentleman, complete with suit and tie and a sharp looking hat, cocked to the side. He wore the happiest smile on his face. Looking at his picture, the tears dried from my eyes and a smile

emerged. He also sent pictures of my two younger sisters, Maryanna and Edna. They were dressed in their nurse's uniforms, which was interesting to me, because I had always wanted to become a nurse. The picture that struck me the most was the one of my grandparents on the boardwalk in Atlantic City. Looking at my grandmother's face, I saw myself! I finally knew who I looked like.

My grandfather secretly wrote to me at least twice a month, and he would also send big boxes, filled with trinkets, clothes and sometimes fishing gear for the boys. My boys would squeal in delight every time the mail lady honked her horn, because they knew it meant another treasure - filled box from Grandpop. One of my prize possessions from Grandpop is a little doll, no bigger than about eight inches, dressed in a beige calico dress and hat. She has little anklets and one shoe missing. Poking out from under her hat are two red pigtails. Her eyes open and shut and her arms and legs move. I believe she must have been Estelle's when she was a child.

The letters and packages continued for about a year and then suddenly stopped. I knew something must be wrong. That is when something truly amazing happened! For the five years I had been writing to Grandma, I had also been calling information to see if I could acquire their telephone number. The reply was always the same, "Sorry ma'am, but the number you requested is unlisted." I had to try again, and that day, an operator told me there was an Anthony Skubish, Jr. who lived in Glenolden, about an hour away. I couldn't believe after all this time, I was given a telephone number. There must have been a higher power working for me. I wrote the number down, and that night, after tucking the kids into bed, I dialed the number. A woman's voice answered, and nervously, I told her who I was and why I was calling. She confirmed that her husband was indeed Grandpop's son and was very excited to talk to me. Aunt Rita told me that Uncle Tony had suspected something was amiss with his sister, but never knew what it was. You see, Estelle was sent away to finish her pregnancy and give birth. The only people

that knew of me were my grandparents, and Estelle's godmother. Alas, Aunt Rita also had some bad news for me. Grandpop had suffered a stroke, but she said he was OK.

In the spring when my Grandpop was well, my aunt and uncle invited me to Philadelphia to meet my Grandpop. Knowing Estelle would not be happy; they invited him to their home for the weekend. I flew to Philadelphia to meet my new family. I was a nervous wreck. My grandfather's speech had been affected by the stroke and I worried about being able to communicate with him. My worries were unwarranted. My reunion with him was so wonderful. We talked for hours and he answered many questions for me. That Sunday, we all went to church and Aunt Rita dropped the hint that it was the church my sister Maryanna went to. So when I returned to Michigan, I called the church and asked if they could contact her for me. Within an hour my sister called me. It was an unbelievable moment for me. That summer her family drove out to meet us. They had planned on staying four days, but stayed a week. It was as if we had known each other forever.

My time with Grandpop was short lived; he died only two years after we met. My sister, Maryanna, convinced me to go to his funeral, saying I had every right to be there. It was a very sad time for me, filled with regrets that my sons never met their wonderful Grandpop. At the funeral, I sat behind Estelle, and in between my two sisters and their families. My mother never acknowledged me. It took great restraint on my part not to go up to her and talk to her. But I realized I was no longer a part of her life, and she wanted to keep it that way. Being a mother myself, I could only imagine the pain she went through when she decided to give me up for adoption, and how difficult it must have been to see the daughter she thought was gone forever. My only choice that day was to respect her decision and her privacy.

After the funeral, we made a one hour journey to the cemetery were Grandpop would be buried. Following the ceremony, a woman came up to me and asked if I was a member of the family. Not knowing who the woman was, I replied that I was just a friend. Later that day I would find out

who that woman was. Before I left the cemetery, I laid a single red rose on my Grandpop's casket. It had been my only gift to him.

At the luncheon following the funeral, I sat with my Aunt Rita and Uncle Tony, and three of my uncle's old Marine buddies. I am sure there were some questions from some of the people there, about my identity. After lunch, I went into the restroom with my sisters. There must have been twenty stalls, and not knowing one of them was occupied, we talked about how Estelle must have felt seeing me. To my surprise, the woman who confronted me at the cemetery emerged from one of the stalls. That woman was Estelle's godmother. She approached me immediately, and hugging me, she told me she knew who I was the moment she saw me. Well, she wasn't afraid of Estelle, and scolded her for not talking to me, and then proceeded to introduce me to all my new relatives. Everyone accepted me with open arms. I was happy to meet everyone, but at the same time, I was very aware of how difficult it must have been for Estelle.

I still keep in touch with my relatives in PA. My sister Maryanna and I and our families get together once in a while to vacation or share a holiday. I don't think Grandpop ever realized what he did for me when he sent me that Christmas card. He gave me roots and a feeling that I finally belonged. I will forever be grateful to my "Grandpop Anthony."

german class, so far

SECOND PLACE POETRY

Heather Herrmann-Miller

From what I hear, I've been doing it wrong.

First, there's the formal and the informal;
the Sie and the du, the dein and the Ihr.

This is meant for distance,
packaged neatly into language and called a norm,
for which breaking, sanctions will quickly be issued.

Those people -
they get offended if you leave your place,
if you get too close, if you use a first name.

Unless, of course, they tell you it's okay at the Biergarten
after work, and it is, until in the office you slip and
call them by a first name again, instead of Herr or Frau or
something like that.

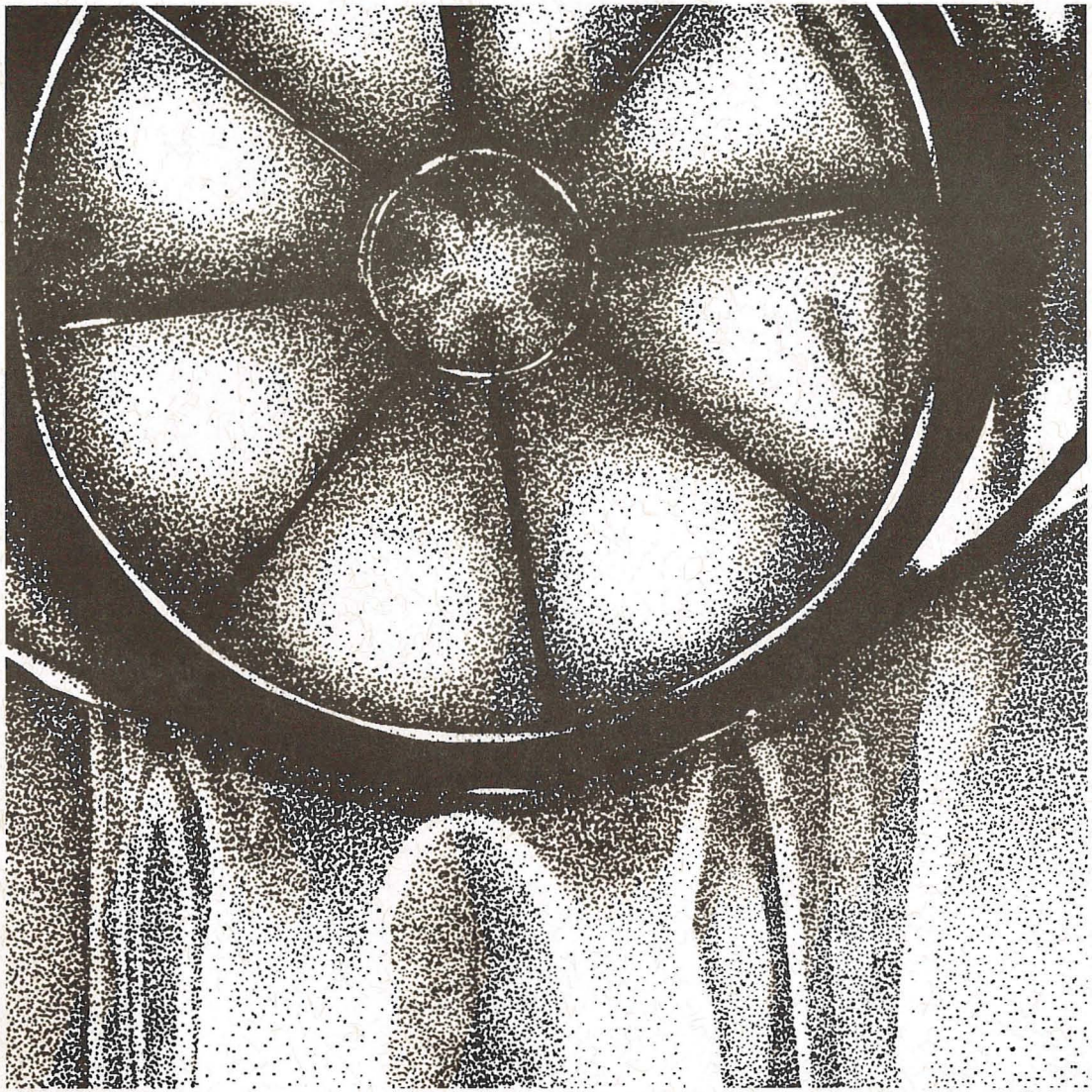
This might work with us.
Pretend I don't know you, Herr.
Nod your head and continue walking,
those eyes practiced and cold,
that distance between me and Sie.

But you and I and a few biers and I
break all protocol because I use du,
and you drop the Frau, and I forget Herr,
feet up, shoes kicked off, music playing loudly.

I slip back into my German self easily,
back to expectations and offenses, and protocol of Nationality.

I become my own country,
slightly divisible,
as I grant myself liberties,
and you justice.

Auf Wiedersehen.



juicer

SELECTION OF MERIT

Rhonda Schreck

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For further information on **Friends of the Arts**, contact Kay McGuigan, SC4, 323 Erie Street, P.O. Box 5015, Port Huron, Michigan 48061-5015, phone 810/984-3881.

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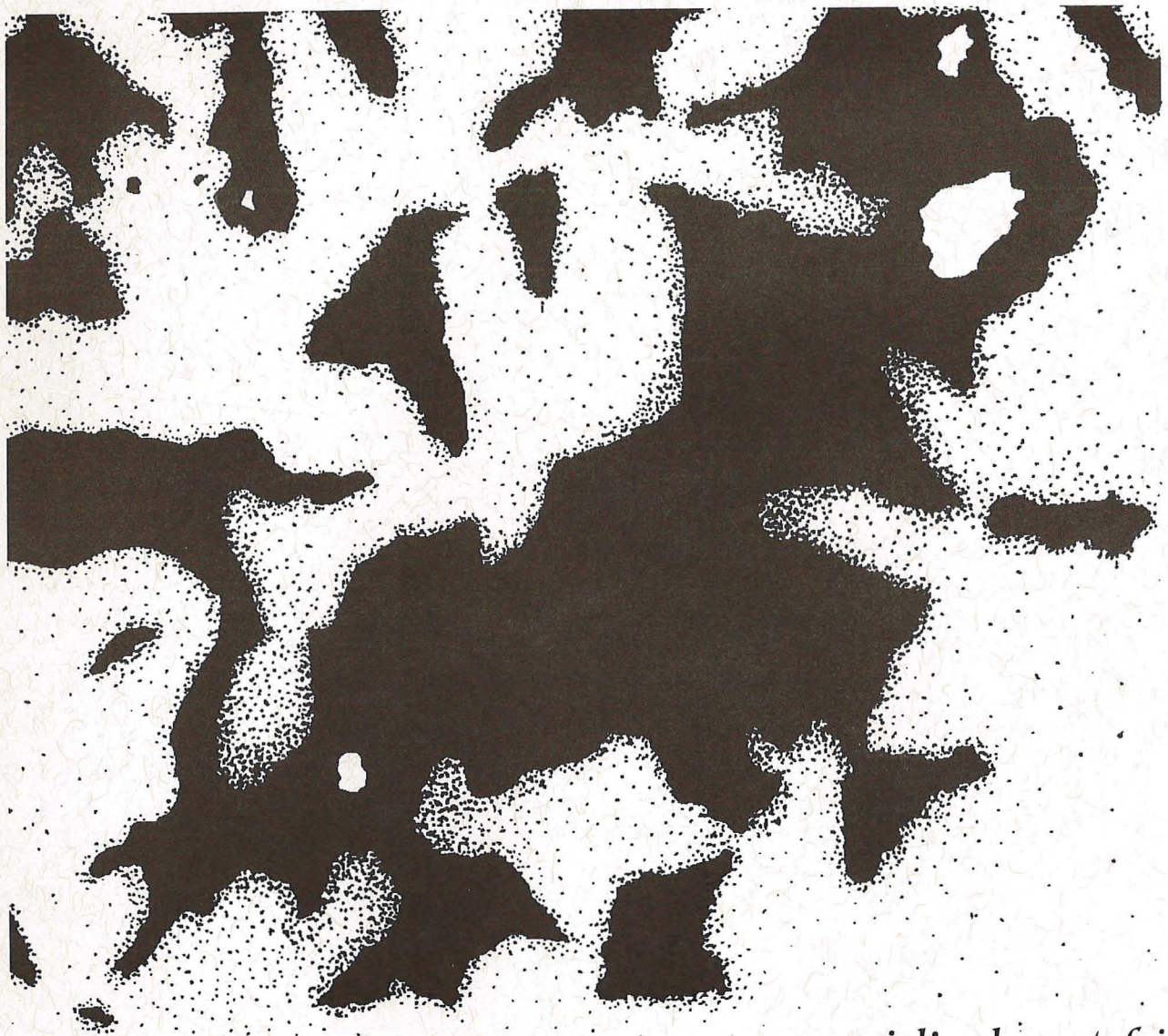
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